

The
Dwale Bluth, Hebditchs
Legacy, And Other
Literary Remains V2
(1876)



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THE DWALE BLUTH
HEBDITCH'S LEGACY
AND OTHER LITERARY REMAINS

OF

OLIVER MADOX-BROWN

AUTHOR OF "GABRIEL DENVER"

EDITED BY

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WITH A MEMOIR AND TWO PORTRAITS.

VOL. II.

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The Author, at the age of four.

HEBDITCH'S LEGACY.

CHAPTER VII.

SECRET PARTING.

WHEN Agnes Desborough first came to live in her uncle's house at Rochester one would never have dreamt she could ever grow beautiful—the big-limbed, awkward girl, with her large flashing eyes and her tawny locks: yet as the seasons went by, a complete alteration took place in her: her form grew slenderer and her swarthy dark-complexioned features changed utterly. Only her dark eyes retained their old flash and fire; otherwise there were very few vestiges of the child's left in the woman's face.

From the first she was singularly wilful and determined; moping and wandering from chamber to chamber of the old red-brick mansion which had become her home, she appeared not to open her lips for entire days. To say the truth, the child was utterly neglected; her uncle was a man whose whole soul had been for years immersed in the business which detained him in London through the week:—

and she seldom if ever encountered a strange face save on Sundays at church. Nevertheless she seemed to turn a situation which in another child's mind might have bred hopeless discontent into a strange half-weird sensuousness and enjoyment of her own: provided they only left her to herself she was happy.

When she was about fourteen her voice changed, enabling her to sing like an angel; but this and the gradual improvements in her countenance attracted no comment: her beauty was allowed to unfold itself as silently as the dawn breaks in the sky over an unconscious and slumbering city.

No person about her ignored its development more utterly than herself; for often she used to sit half the morning facing her looking-glass, brooding over what she took for her ugliness! There are terrible struggles occur at times deep down in a young girl's heart, ere her mind can accept fully the beauty or ugliness it has dimly become aware of.

Agnes became a woman, even before her uncle had properly realized her existence as a child. In her early years, as said above, she had been wayward and resolute; but as he had never taken interest enough in his orphan niece to inquire into or oppose himself to any of her whims, the real depth and passion of her character had remained undetected; so to speak they were something in reserve for him. He had begun to take more notice of her lately and to wonder rather as he looked: the girl's face even obtruded itself on his business hours, and he began to look forward, as with a faint tinge of pleasure, to the day and a half which he spent at the end of the week in his country house with her. In fact, a complete change took place in the relations

they bore to each other ; he roused himself to the fact of her existence and began to take an interest in her. This state of things went on increasing till the girl was past twenty and nearly of age,—when she unexpectedly took an idea into her head with the course of which his new-born and sudden regard for her made him think it necessary to interfere in a very decisive fashion.

But meanwhile, slowly and painfully detaching its dim mist-stricken circle from the tops of the trees in the garden of Oldrington House—"Pale as the sumptuous bosom of a rose,"—the moon swam up into the sky ; disuniting all the ground below in scintillant entanglements, and lighting up the vine leaves into a colourless aureole round Agnes Desborough's head where she still leant from the verandah. All up that side of the house the vine leaves were struggling for bare existence with the ivy—that most self-assertive of all vegetable parasites—which had over-grown the rest of the wall, visibly strangling them. There was something most woefully desolate in the present look of the place, with the effrontery of its blank windows outstaring the moon, and with this one figure visible there. It was as though its walls, grown old and chilly, had drawn the foliage of the "*Hedera muralia*" round them like a cloak, to keep the wind out. This girl was so utterly alone—so intensely silent, that one might have taken her for some guardian spirit, haunting the garden she was looking over. Presently, however, a large black cat took her by surprise, and leapt noiselessly on to the rail beside where she leant ; evidently with friendly intentions—balancing itself and rubbing its head on her wrists, seeking to comfort her in some dumb inarticulate

fashion of its feline nature. What was the good of grieving—when there were mice and birds and black-beetles and heaven knows what besides to be feasted on all over the house, for the trouble of pouncing on them? not to mention an innumerable army of other cats to be made love to or fought with all round the neighbourhood, for the trouble of climbing into the gardens. If only human beings would be reasonable like cats! Then, quite suddenly, the animal ceased purring and turned aside, quivering all over and staring intently into the gloom below.

Some slight stir there attracted its attention—the flight of a bat perhaps; nothing else, for the thunder had ceased seemingly ten minutes since.

Its mistress still pressing her hands on her eyes—as if to shut out thus the thoughts that encircled her—started too, and raised her head again. For they both had caught the fall of a footstep grating lightly on one of the garden paths beneath, so low as to be almost inaudible. Another instant, and looking down, Agnes distinctly saw the dark outline of a human form pass through one of the patches of moonlight, as if a fragment of the shadow had broken off and flitted suddenly to the other side; while simultaneously a low vibration of sound, like a human whisper, floated up through the darkness and into their ears—a name twice repeated “Agnes:—Agnes!”

The place in which she stood was raised some nine feet above the ground; and, dimly discernible in the night, a moss-discoloured flight of stone steps seemed to lead from it to the lawn below. Her first impulse evidently was to descend these; but checking herself, she turned back through the door and into the room behind.

It was empty.

Not satisfied yet, she stepped stealthily out on to the landing-place beyond which formed the first flight of a well staircase, crowned at top with a skylight, such as might have been some gigantic spider dropping down on her as she looked at it. Silence everywhere—not even the ticking of a clock! The cat alone made a faint purring at her feet, at which she caught it up in her arms. It took but a single instant more to regain the room and wipe the tell-tale traces of the tears from her eyes—to glance instinctively into the invisible looking-glass and run her wet fingers through the ripples of her hair; then, holding her skirts to prevent their rustling, she was slowly and cautiously making her way out into the garden.

Stirred by the wind, the trees overhead whispered and muttered mysteriously; making weird signs to her with their branches, it seemed, and with all their leaves in motion: all the gloom round her was filled with a stealthy murmur and movement, as though the very atmosphere were shuddering over some new prodigy born of the darkness.

Indeed, as she reached the foot of the steps, with the moonlight still in her eyes, Agnes could distinguish nothing whatever; yet her startled imagination invested the whole place, familiar as it was to her, with a wild sense of solemnity and awe.

Few minds are really at ease in the dark.

The silence was again most intense—she could almost hear the excited throbbings of her heart through it. Then something like a human form seemed advancing in front of her, and she stretched her hands to it. But no; it was only

a tall damp bush with a dim reflection of the moonlight on it. Just as she was about to give some sign of her presence the first splashes of a sudden shower of rain began pattering heavily through the garden, and up to where she stood, completely drowning the sound of her voice. At the same time a vague half-discernible figure, as of the man she had first seen, emerged from the darkness again, close at her side, and answering her alarmed whisper. Without a word spoken they seemed to recognize each other. Then they began slowly stealing their way, pressed close together, in the shadow among the spots of light that still fell through the rain, till, at last stumbling across the over-grown flower-beds and the entangled walks between them, they came to a secluded recess right at the end of the lawn; in the midst of a band of laurel-bushes that sprang up round the trunks of the trees there. Here, under the serried fretwork of the boughs and with the wet leaves weltering all round their faces and hands, they managed to ensconce themselves.

"I thought I should never get to see you again!" exclaimed the girl; speaking for the first time and always in the same suppressed whisper. The beauty of tone in her utterance was something wonderful; it altered in modulation like some subtle music, seeming to linger round her till its meaning might have been lost sight of in its softness.

"When I got inside," the other rejoined, "I saw some figure like you, just in front of me—but when I spoke you vanished:—was it only my own imagination? Where is Miss Cullingworth?" he continued, in the same undertone.

But at this question there was a dead silence between them.

"What can all this sudden mystery be, Agnes—your cousin objects to my coming here?"

"She has gone *mad*, Stephen."

"Mad!"

"Ever since the afternoon she refused to see you any longer: she has lost all control over herself, I can hide it no longer!"

"But it can't be easy to hide! Good God!—is, is your uncle not here now?"

"No and he knows nothing of it when he is! She is only like this with me.—She!—she!—"

And as Agnes Desborough attempted to speak, her voice already struggling with her sobs, a sudden burst of the rain came down on the trees more fiercely than ever; showering through the foliage with a sombre muffled reverberation and splashing wildly on the harder ground outside; never ceasing an instant, as if its whole soul were set on piercing the protection of the foliage and reaching these two where they stood sheltered from its malice. The moonbeams shrank back through the intersecting boughs like the horns of a disturbed snail, leaving all the garden in perfect darkness. At last the rain lessened in violence somewhat, and the clouds overhead opened disclosing the light again.

Twenty minutes more and the shower had passed away—the moon floated free in the sky, and everywhere the wet keen smell of the rain rose from the earth.

Then these two emerged from their hiding-place among the shadows and into the open air.

CHAPTER VIII.

STILL SECRETLY PARTING; ALSO THE CONTINUATION OF A
PREVIOUS CONVERSATION.

FOR a few moments neither of them spoke.

But in silence at times there lies an inexpressible eloquence; it says what nothing else can—it has a music and a speech of its own.

“I must leave you now; if we were found here our whole plan might be ruined!” exclaimed Agnes at last. “She might take it into her head to come down at any moment. But have no fear for me; she is far more deeply to be dreaded for her own sake than for mine, when she speaks and acts as she has done to-night. Everything must wait till you come yourself—we must part now.”

“Not for a little while!”

“Yes—now.”

“And for three whole weeks, then?”

“For three weeks.”

Reluctant to separate, as it were, they remained an instant still; their hands clinging together, their faces almost touching, over five minutes it might have been.

Just then in the far distance a church-clock struck suddenly.

It was eleven.

At this there was a sound as of a kiss reiterated in the darkness, and then a dim spectral figure glided up the rain-swept paths towards the verandah. The other stood

motionlessly till this one disappeared into the house, where the moonlight fell on its walls, then vanished almost as stealthily. Once more the place seemed given over to its former solitude.

Yet it was not so deserted as it looked.

For quite unexpectedly a third figure passed into the view of the moonlight from among the shadows of the trees where those two others had concealed themselves.

This also went up towards the verandah and was lost to sight there.

* * * * *

"It sounds most dreadful. I can't say I'm surprised at anything now, Helmore. But you've taken so much time up telling it, that there can hardly be time for what I was to tell you in return. It's two o'clock already. Sit down again."

"Well?"

"Wait, I'll light my cigar. You asked me this afternoon before the walk we took together what could be my motive for exchanging from the regiment in this way, and going to such a place as India, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, before a week is over I shall be out on the high seas; there can be no harm in my telling you now.

"In the autumn of last year, the major of a certain regiment went up to London with a friend of his who was an ensign under the same colours. The major lived at the ensign's house, Helmore, where he was introduced to his friend's uncle, and his cousin, a young lady of great beauty and wealth. She was engaged to marry his friend, but the major knew nothing of that; the whole household treated him with

the intensest kindness, and he fell in love with this young lady from the first moment he set eyes on her. Well, he may have stopped at this house over a week; then for three days he went back to his regiment at Chatham, unable to sleep at night for thinking of her. And all this while he still knew nothing of her engagement. He was to come back in a week, and he did this. He returned to London one afternoon, and found his friend's cousin all by herself in the drawing-room; and—and in some insane fashion he let her know how he loved her. And she told him she loved him back again,—that she reciprocated his sudden affection. For about twenty seconds he might have been the happiest man in the world. People are sometimes led away by their passions. Then suddenly this girl told him that although she was willing to love him, she was already engaged to her cousin. Well, I won't describe the scene that took place between them; it ended by the major extracting a solemn promise from her to forget him as though they had never met, and to love her cousin instead of him. And then she fainted, and he quitted her, and went straight back to Chatham, and lived in a state of misery till he got over it again, as he has at last."

"Good God! Stanwise, I see it all now!"

"Well, then?"

"And my cousin is still in love with you."

"I am sorry to hear it."

"You must marry her!"

"On Saturday I sail for Calcutta."

CHAPTER IX.

WHEREIN THE THREAD OF THE STORY UNWINDS ITSELF.

Prima facie, the aspect of Clifford's Inn is somewhat different in June from the description we may remember of it one dreary November afternoon, some seven or eight years back, and in the first chapter of this story.

It might have been ten o'clock in the morning. The trees are all in leaf now, and the sunshine falls through them in straggling flashes and curves; for those two sworn and implacable enemies, old-age and sunshine, meet face to face sometimes, even in Clifford's Inn;—neither seeming to get the better of it very considerably though, for the sunbeams choke visibly in the dust and the houses look darker than ever. The cawing of the Inn rooks still mingles with the resonant clattering of the streets outside in a desultory undertone, suggestive both of town and country, and yet of neither. It might be Bruges—it might be Nuremberg; one could hardly have supposed the place to be in London. . . .

A glorious morning it must have been out in the country! Yet many busy brains were toiling within the precincts of Clifford's Inn, while the sunshine thus fell upon it, lighting up the dusty old chambers and vainly pretending to gladden its sombre soot-laden old heart again.

To all appearances the Inn looked more deserted than ever.

Presently, however, an elderly hard-featured man, stooping slightly in the shoulders, and clad in a long grey

paletot, walked through the archway, out of the turmoil and bustle of Fleet Street just beyond. When a stranger enters one of these Inns he invariably stops and looks about him, as though he would take his hat off or retreat again, an involuntary trepidation of homage as it were; for over all of them the same strange *nuance* of respectability (and of the spidery decay and general stagnation characteristic thereof) lies as a veil; and the English worship respectability. This man then paused and looked about him rather nervously, it seemed. Indeed there was some plainly discernible trouble in his face. But this done he turned aside rapidly and with his shadow following him, till he came to the corner-house No. —, on which a full blaze of the sunlight fell unhindered. There was a cat stretched out on one of the sills, and he stopped to caress it as he passed, more by way of gaining a little time, it seemed; for when the animal fled he found himself stroking the stone in its place. Entering the passage, which was damp and clammy, and struck cold upon him—for all the warmth outside—he rapped at last upon the first door he came to, and stood there waiting, with something like a shudder.

“Girdlestone and Blackoder.”

The letters written up in black across the panels seemed to dance before his eyes as he watched them; indeed the door had suddenly sprung back of its own accord, leaving him free to enter, which he did.

Then it shut behind him with a trap-like clang.

Inside there were four clerks all bending over a high desk, not one of whom raised his head or took the vaguest notice of him, till such time as he had gathered courage to speak.

"Is Mr. Blackoder disengaged?" he faltered at last.

Thus accosted the fourth rose, still without so much as a glance at him, and went into the interior chamber.

Presently the clerk returned.

"This way, please."

The visitor at this ushered himself into a second apartment which was empty, to his relief seemingly; for he began wiping his forehead very hard. The walls round him were piled up with boxes; black and almost threatening they looked, in their tin facings and with their gilt lettering; for somehow they reminded him of a set of tombstones. Everything about the room was polished and substantial, everything seemed to reflect everything as it were, and yet everything was dark and gloomy; the chairs were stiff and upright, like Puritan divines. There was a mingled scent of sealing-wax, ink, and Russia leather over the whole apartment. It was rectitude and prosperity personified in fact; a very different place from the room we may recollect some eight years back, full of the fog and with a certain shadow brooding on the ceiling. There was even a shaft of sunlight which struck through it at present, quivering up where this shadow had been.

But above all other things he noticed a second door fronting the one he had entered by, and on this door he directed his whole attention.

Presently there came a rustling of papers through it.

At this he jumped up to his feet again, though after a minute passed thus he sat down, still wiping his forehead.

This occurred three time over.

Then suddenly the door opened in reality and a second

map was facing him, this time ere he could rise. It was Mr. Blackoder in *propria persona*. Years had wrought their changes in his face now; his eyes and mouth were firmer than ever; but his hair was white. Years! It might have been twenty, so changed was he and hardened.

"I have come as—as—you were good enough to suggest," began the stranger timidly.

"Certainly."

"I—I—"

"Certainly, sit down again."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now I don't for an instant pretend to conceal the effect—the shock I might even add—this, to say the least of it, unexpected communication of yours has produced on me, Mr. Cullingworth," the lawyer recommenced, drawing a chair and seating himself on it, with his eyes fixed firmly on the other's face.

"I—I feared as much, when I was compelled to write it, sir."

"Doubtless."

"And I trust, sir, you will have considered me to have—to—"

"To have acted as you should have done in the matter? Well, that remains to be seen."

"I can only assure you most solemnly, sir, that I had not the remotest idea of my niece's character until, as I explained to you, my daughter for the first time spoke to me, describing what had taken place three nights before in the garden, and leading me to recognise your nephew in her description of his conversation overheard there."

"No."

"It shocked and took me as much by surprise as it could have taken you, sir! I—I could not conceive her meaning. I thought she had been bereft of her senses until I spoke to Miss Desborough herself, which left me in no doubt whatever, I grieve to say. I was then utterly taken aback. Only in one point did their statements diverge,—regarding the fact of your nephew's having first paid his attentions to my daughter, Miss Cullingworth, ere he turned them to her cousin instead. I consider them both mad together on that point, sir."

"Possibly. When will your niece be of age, you say?"

"In three weeks, sir; on the—"

"And until then my nephew and she have arranged not to meet again?"

"She tells me so, sir."

"Then you have three weeks before you, Mr. Cullingworth."

"Sir?"

"In that time you must impress the responsibility of her position upon this young person. You follow me?"

"I do, sir."

"In this three weeks a fresh meeting between them must be made impossible. You still follow me?"

"Hitherto I have exerted but little authority over my daughter or niece; since their poor mothers'—"

"Yes. But in future you *must* exert a little authority over them. You understand me now?"

"I—I am sorry, sir!"

"Mr. Cullingworth, we must speak plainly; as much for your own sake as for mine, be it added. Your niece,

coming of age, will be entitled to a sum of four thousand pounds, for which you are trustee—is this not so ? ”

“ It is, sir.”

“ I thought as much. Here, let me pour you out some water, the air seems somewhat close round us. But unfortunately you have invested this money in a certain business now carried on under your hands somewhere close by in the City, and have lost it, and losing it have borrowed certain other moneys from me to regain it with, which project you have not as yet succeeded in—is this not so too ? ”

“ Alas, sir ! ”

“ Certainly, certainly. So that even were the property now embarked in your business not *mine* by these mortgages between us, you would still not be in a position to repay your niece when legally called upon. You still see my meaning ? ”

“ My niece, sir—~~my~~ niece .

“ Exactly. Your niece may not object to this in a strictly legal sense. Her husband *may* however, and were he my nephew, he certainly would, for he would have nothing else to live upon ; therefore seeing how impossible it would be to fulfil your obligations—”

“ Good Heaven ! Mr. Blackoder, you will drive me mad like my own daughter if, if—”

“ To fulfil your obligations to him I say, it will be the best policy on *your* part to nip this affair in the bud while you can and may. But I give you a plain hint that if it goes on any further I shall hold *you* personally responsible for anything that may come of it. The utter ruin of whatever commercial position you still have—without mentioning what *else* may occur—can but result from this affair, where

it concerns yourself. It is far too serious to last longer. My nephew I shall see this evening—your niece I leave in your own hands; deal with her as you will. But one thing I must be certain of.”

“Sir?”

“Every single particle of information acquirable on this subject by you has been communicated to me, I presume, in your recent letter—you have nothing further to let me know?”

“I have not, sir.”

“And you are absolutely certain these two have not communicated with each other since your discovery?”

“Absolutely.”

“Very well, Mr. Cullingworth. And now permit me to advise you to go straight back to Rochester, where you may reflect a little on our mutual position. For the present, good morning!”

And in another moment Mr. Blackoder had bowed his visitor through the outer chamber where his clerks sat, and out into the passage, where with a final clang the door closed upon him as it had opened before. Once more the sun-light and the open air—of London if not precisely of Heaven!—it was an improvement certainly. His shadow (which hitherto had stopped modestly outside at the entrance) flew to his feet again, but this time neither made the slightest pause within the precincts of the “Inn.”

CHAPTER X.

WHEREIN THE THREAD STILL UNWINDS.

"WELL, Agnes; you can guess what my interview with Mr. Blackoder was about. You've had a *very narrow escape* from that heartless young bl— fellow," remarked Mr. Cullingworth peering into his niece's face, for, in the twilight now deepening, he could scarce see her, though his own features, angry and persuasive by turns, were still perceptible, and wore an expression incredibly narrow-minded and selfish. "When that miserable young man used to come here, he was already engaged to his cousin! Did you ever hear such a story?"

But Agnes made no reply, though in the obscurity her face flushed and grew pale by turns; his voice was only answered by the sighing of the wind in the elm-leaves overhead.

"He shall never see you again while I can prevent him. There's no good in turning white and pretending to cry—all women do that. He could no more marry you than I could. Now don't interrupt me, Agnes. I would willingly spare your feelings, but one can't palliate such conduct, and if you knew as much about him as I do, you might have some cause for getting in a temper. Why, if he were to marry any one but his cousin, he'd be a simple beggar—a beggar, mind that! But he won't: for he's gone to make peace with his uncle this very night, and will not return

here for a long while to come. To my mind a man who behaves in such a way is little better than an absolute swindler," said the ex-pawnbroker. "You ought to thank me—God I mean—for being rescued from him. When I told him I was going to have an interview with his uncle—how I had detected him—he turned paler than you are now."

"And you say he is going to marry Miss Blackoder after *all*?" asked Agnes, speaking for the first time with perhaps some slight inadvertent emphasis on the last word.

"Of course he is; what else could he do?"

The girl turned aside for a moment—possibly to conceal the traces of some emotion which revealed itself in her countenance. Then she turned back again, facing her uncle, and said steadily—as if by some irrepressible impulse—"he will never marry her—*never*."

"Eh?" cried the old man, getting up and putting his hand to his ear as though he had not heard her properly, "what d'ye mean, Agnes?"

She answered him not a word—only there was a nervous scintillant flash where her dark eyes caught the last reflections from the sunset.

"I've said all *I* can: and if you have any more to do with him, I'll never trouble my head about you again," exclaimed the uncle, tapping his feet impatiently; and then in a hypochondriacal tone. "An invalid like me can't bear up against such annoyance and worry. For the last time will you promise me or not?" Again there was a long unbroken pause while the leaves rustled overhead.

"Well, if you will *not* speak, I can't make you. God alone knows what's come over the world, for I don't." And

saying this the old man got up, leaning heavily on the balcony rail, and went round inside the house, as though too disgusted to remain near his niece any longer.

CHAPTER XI.

RETROSPECTIVE.

CRAYSTON BLACKODER was in reality the son of a Bristol lawyer, who having committed a forgery died a convict. It had even been said that *he had been hanged*. Thus at the age of nineteen he was thrown entirely upon his own resources. He had indeed not only been thus suddenly obliged to provide for himself, but an only sister as well was left dependent on his care; then a beautiful intelligent girl, much younger than himself—a mere child indeed. Their mother had been the daughter of a Greek merchant, distinguished alike for her beauty and intellect, but had been in her grave long since. It might be said that the son inherited her genius, and his sister her beauty. This was their dowry, and with it they had to face the world. Both, however, inherited in common from their Greek mother a certain passionate impatience and revengefulness of temper liable to flash out unexpectedly, though without due provocation it might perhaps never have been roused into existence. Christine's nature was, nevertheless, full of sweetness and simplicity—but in this respect she bore about as much resemblance to her brother as a wild rose bears to the bramble it grows upon. In him the subtle imagination and stealthi-

ness of the Greek were enhanced by the quick resolution and *sang-froid* of the Englishman, and what character could be more complicated or dangerous? capable at needs of realizing the wildest schemes the intellect could conceive, if only likely to redound to his own aggrandisement and profit,—and yet he was by no means one who began life with delusions, or feared to look the truth in the face. His first act was to change his name and come up to London, but there, without friends or credit, and utterly without reputation, a severe and soul-demoralizing struggle lay before him. The labour of three or four years passed away, without bearing any fruit as far as success in his profession was concerned. He and his sister lived with the greatest economy and had no friends. Under the influence of one disappointment after another, his hair began to turn grey and his brow to shrivel up prematurely, sinister signs of experience and the discontent which too often accompanies it. . . .

But after a while there came a change in his prospects—one morning, in a crowded city street, he accidentally pushed up against two young men who were walking arm-in-arm, evidently going to their business. As he tried to pass, one of them caught him by the shoulder; looking up he half recognized two schoolfellows with whom in youth he had been intimate, but in reality they seemed to remember him a great deal better than he remembered them. They were both extremely alike, being brothers, and at first he could scarcely distinguish one from the other, or recall their names; all he well remembered was that they were brothers, and members of a rich Roman Catholic family, and that they three had been educated together. But maintaining a discreet silence on this forgetfulness

(for his keen ever-scheming intellect saw in an instant the assistance that two such friends might afford him), he greeted them with a sudden burst of cordiality—a most dignified and wonderful piece of acting; for no one could have read in his face the bitterness and envy that rankled in his mind as he felt how painfully his prospects had altered since last he saw them.

He hated all the world at that moment.

Yet his poverty, self-evident as it was, in no way seemed to weaken the heartiness and pleasure with which they greeted him in return.

The extreme simplicity and ignorance of the world with which Mr. Blackoder found them endowed were rather surprising, but the business which they carried on in the city was in flourishing condition, and they seemed to have many rich friends and relatives; and what with the young lawyer's knowledge of human nature and genius for conversation, and their good faith and honesty, it was not long before their suddenly renewed intimacy grew deeper than it had ever been.

Soon afterwards it happened that the younger brother of the two became acquainted with Crayston's sister, Christine.

It has already been hinted that in her youth Christine showed promise of beauty; but indeed during the few short years she had passed in London (as if the contrast presented by the hideous places she lived in had only served to deepen natural advantages) she had grown, in a certain sense astonishingly lovely. Her eyes were so clear and brilliant that their colour was scarcely visible, and although her complexion was in reality darker than her

brother's there never seemed the slightest tinge of blood discernible in her cheeks—not even when she absolutely blushed. The impression her face really conveyed was one of intense physical weakness and want of energy: in fact she possessed that beauty, so often experienced in people of very delicate organization, which arises solely from *expression*—peaceful, tender and harmonious the smile of such a face steals and acts upon the senses like the sudden unlooked-for odour of some beautiful flower, or like the rhythm of a song. Her hair was black, her figure slender and exquisitely formed. She very seldom spoke, and perhaps the positive expression of her face was too melancholy to please many people; but the young man fell desperately in love with her at first sight, and three weeks after was secretly engaged to her; *secretly* because he knew that to gain the consent of any of the friends or relatives his position depended on was hopeless. He was supported however by his own brother, who being, as he thought, on the point of being married himself, perhaps felt some kind of sympathy with them: and one may feel certain that *her* brother in no way discouraged the younger one's attentions. Thus their friendship grew deeper and deeper, and they all became like one family. This was quite unexpected by Blackoder; his sister had never entered into his calculations before; he had never conceived that she could be of any use to him.

Hitherto the poor girl had not lived a very happy life, in spite of her beauty. The importunities of petty tradesmen are not to be assuaged with words, no matter how sweet may be the lips that utter them; and living all by herself, without a single friend, she had suffered

from loneliness and poverty even more than her brother, who had, at least, his scanty and ill-paid business to occupy him.

The young lady to whom the elder brother was engaged was the only daughter of a rich solicitor whom Crayston knew well by reputation; senior partner in the firm of Girdlestone and Girdlestone. Mr. S—— was very much in love with Miss Girdlestone; the father (Crayston learned somehow) had exerted all his authority to advance him in his daughter's favour; but she, being singularly headstrong and capricious, at first scarcely condescended to look at her enamoured suitor—according at least to the description he himself gave to his intended brother-in-law—still, it is certain that after a while she had come round, and really consented to marry him. But every now and then some little expression would escape her lips, seeming to indicate that his *fiancée* did not respect and love him so ardently as he could have desired. This troubled his spirit greatly, and, moreover, caused him to seek, in strict confidence, his friend Crayston's advice. It must be confessed that the young man was decidedly weak-minded; the fact that his commonest letters consisted chiefly of notes of exclamation will give a better insight into his character than would a couple of pages of description.

Of course a man of Mr. Blackoder's pushing and agreeable manners very soon got introduced to the family of which the above vague description has been given; with the members of which his unmistakable refinement and candour soon ingratiated him firmly; indeed Mr. Girdlestone treated him with marked respect. This

was the first opportunity of reintroduction to the society from which his father's ruin had excluded him, and he was determined it should not slip through his fingers.

Whether he ever really fell in love with this young lady can never be said; but he at any rate began secretly paying her great attentions; and (always without her father's knowledge or consent) made such an impression on her that before long he completely alienated her affections from his friend.

In the meantime he had grown very intimate with a gentleman whom he had met at this house, a Mr. George Stephen Helmore, a rich city stock-broker, as it turned out a son of one of the partners of Helmore and Blackoder, a man well known in the city, and of good position and family; but whose habits were rumoured to be as profligate and repellent as his person was prepossessing. One evening Mr. Helmore unexpectedly came back with Crayston to where he and his sister lived in Lincoln's Inn Fields. As they both entered the room in which she sat, Christine rose in surprise, blushing perhaps more deeply than might have been expected, when she caught sight of the stranger who accompanied her brother. There is something transcendently sweet in the blush of a dark-complexioned face. Crayston was an acute observer, but indeed a more obtuse one could hardly have failed to observe the impression his sister's animated girlish beauty had produced on the man who accompanied him. After his first glance at her Mr. Helmore seemed absolutely bewildered: still staring at her, he paid her some half stammered-out and awkward compliments, at which she blushed still more.

Christine seemed hardly offended, however, at the deep burning glances that were bestowed upon her, for even in the most modest women there exists a certain inborn instinctive longing—one might almost say *necessity* for flattery and admiration. Nevertheless she was scarcely at her ease; but presently she quitted the room, and when she came back again her brother noticed that she had been braiding her long black hair again. Most women are attracted by a dare-devil look in a man's face even more than by a handsome one. This man with his black moustache and ominous eyes had both. Towards nine o'clock they went out to walk in the garden of the square. The fitful noises and murmurs of the London streets rose and fell around them but half audible—not a breath of air stirred anywhere the foliage of the dusty trees under which they passed; it was one of those moonlight evenings rare to Londoners, when the very utmost depths of the heavens unveil their splendours. Helmore lit a cigar, sucking it nervously till its sharp glow lit up their faces, casting their shadows behind them. Crayston scarcely spoke—his plan in bringing Christine and Helmore together was so far successful; for it was plain that his friend was getting more and more infatuated every moment. Keen-witted and struggling he already grasped in imagination the advantages that might accrue to him if only he could persuade Christine to cancel her present engagement; and *cancelled* he determined it should be! Whether or not she was in love with young S—— never occurred to him to inquire. As for Christine herself, she had never seemed in higher spirits: her voice could be heard at intervals ringing with laughter along the gloomy paths, while Helmore puffed his cigar

and talked incessantly. Crayston walked at their side sombre and brooding.

It could scarcely have been a fortnight after Miss Girdlestone's introduction to Crayston Blackoder—so rapidly do events sometimes unfold themselves—that the young man who was engaged to her unexpectedly received a letter which destroyed his peace of mind for some little time to come. This letter was from Miss Girdlestone herself. He was as though thunderstruck. Hurrying back to town (for he was with his brother in Herefordshire at the time) the first person he met was Blackoder himself, to whom he revealed the circumstances of his affliction,—through whose instrumentality it had been created, and to whom, moreover, he showed the letter which had created it. The reasons which induced Miss Girdlestone (she had copied it from the original rough copy provided by Crayston himself) to break off the engagement, were not perhaps so explicit in it as they might have been; but its contents showed clearly that she was desirous of annulling her engagement, and that she was determined to do so at all risks. Apparently Crayston, who had acquired considerable control over himself, had also gained a great influence over the young man; at any rate, he now proceeded in all sincerity to give him the best advice he could, which was to comply quietly with Miss Girdlestone's request; and he so far prevailed with his friend that, at his own dictation, the young man had written a letter to her before he had quitted Crayston's little office. When he had finished and signed this, feeling perhaps as people will under such circumstances, he paced about the room in a perfect agony, bursting at last

into tears. The friend sympathetically poured out some water in a tumbler, and tried to reason with him. Matters now drew to a crisis.

The next thing that happened was that S.'s younger brother found that his family knew all about his engagement, and every member of it was up in arms against so wildly extravagant an idea,—from his father, who threatened never to see him again, down to his very sisters, who wrote imploring letters. What with the sudden unaccountable rupture of his brother's engagement and the unwelcome discovery of his own, the whole family seemed distracted. People in this world make so much disturbance and quarrel so frequently over trifles that when anything serious happens they have to act like madmen to make any impression on each other. The young man himself was in complete despair; how was he to marry when his father threatened to cut him off with a shilling, and when he would have his own income only to depend upon? He wrote to Blackoder, and after a while received a very guarded reply, but in it he was advised to comply with his father and break off his unfortunate engagement. This he indignantly refused to do. He had not seen Christine for seven weeks now, and he had given her brother his word not to attempt to do so for six months more, so their correspondence was the only method of communication between them. One day he received a letter from her which took him utterly by surprise; in short, Christine was as wholly and utterly under her stronger-minded brother's control as a fly is under that of a spider when once entangled in its web.

There is a certain class of men whose intellect throws

out and environs itself with such a subtle invisible allure-ment and charm that the will of whoso falls into it is forthwith blinded and strangled utterly. Crayston was determined his sister should marry no one but the man he should choose himself; he had not seen fit to oppose her engagement with S., simply because he saw nothing better for her at the time; but now his friend Helmore had fallen in love with her, and his own secret engagement with Miss Girdlestone had intervened—making it necessary to adopt some alternative—and he made up his mind to cancel her present engagement; he explained this to her, not telling her his real reasons, however. If her placid acquiescence should appear too strange, one must remember the Greek blood in the poor girl's veins; among the Easterns, women occupy a very different position from what the extraordinary being which goes by that name occupies in England. In short, Christine made up her mind to break off her engagement.

Helmore had been constant and unremitting in his attentions towards her. First her vanity had been flattered, then her brother had so seriously spoken to her that she had broken with S., and now she felt slightly in love with Helmore; but when at last he realised her brother's hopes by proposing to her, she seemed for a moment to catch a glimpse of the future,—she burst into tears and refused him.

Her brother, overjoyed as he was, became perfectly astounded when the poor girl ventured to raise objections; whether she would lead a happy life had never entered into his calculations, and he never ceased reasoning with her until he had convinced her of the necessity of accept-

ing. Indeed, so great was his influence over her that she grew thoroughly ashamed of the visible repugnance with which she had at first received her suitor's generous advances, and resolved to make amends for it. Before long his handsome person and insinuating manners so prevailed that, inexperienced and impressionable as the girl was, she fell passionately in love with him. Two months after their first meeting they were married. This marriage, however, resulted in a bitter mockery of the divine injunctions of the ceremony which inaugurated it. Helmore grew weary of married life in twelve months; one child was born, of whom we have already heard in the course of this narrative, and then for five years his wife endured a perpetually recurring series of cruelties and degradations;—her existence embittered by the love she continued—in spite of herself—to bear him. It is significant that she never uttered one word of complaint from first to last; the stealthy, secret, revengeful natures which the Hellenic people inherit seemed wanting in her. The beauty which distinguished her face was soon extinguished—she grew utterly desponding and enervated—she saw that her husband despised her sufferings thoroughly, and she felt that she loved him still. Affairs grew worse and worse; some of his actions really seemed like insanity. Her heart began, half unconsciously, to long for some retaliation upon his infidelity; once she dreamt that she had poisoned him. At last, one night, there came a real climax. Some slight dispute occurred between them in which she behaved with a sudden and unexpected reappearance of energy—and, carried away by an outburst of passion, he actually raised his hand and struck her.

This shocking dispute took place in the presence of a flauntingly-dressed servant, whom he had just boasted of having transferred his affections to, and whose insolent behaviour had partly brought on the scene. As she felt the blow, a stifled moan escaped her, as though her heart were breaking; then there was a pause, during which they both looked at each other.

Now when a woman has once loved a man, her former passion lends a fearful impetus to any sudden hatred she may conceive against him. For a moment Mrs. Helmore's face stung and smarted with shame—after that the very blood seemed turned to fire in her veins, and all her soul grew wild with a just and frantic indignation; a sinister glitter came into her eyes, and the next instant her husband saw that she had caught up a knife, which unfortunately lay in her reach. Coward as he was, he immediately sprang back attempting to escape; but ere he could reach the staircase, he felt her thin convulsive hand clutch his arm. Its touch seemed to paralyse him, for as he attempted to scream, his voice rattled and died away in his throat, and as he shrank back shuddering, something (the knife he had seen) stung him twice poignantly near his heart. His brain whirled round, his feet seemed no longer on the floor, and with a desperate effort to retain his senses, he staggered out on the landing, where, with a dull thud which shook the windows in their sashes, he fell, striking his head lifelessly against the balusters. The girl who had witnessed this scene, fled terror-stricken, not daring even to cry out.

Mrs. Helmore glared at her as she passed, blew the light out with a shudder, and in another moment had

gained the street. It had been snowing ; the flakes were still whirling down steadily round the lamps, the atmosphere and the ground were white ; no star was visible, everything else was hidden in the deepest obscurity. She had no bonnet or cloak ; her hair was full of melting snow, and her body was white with it, and her feet and hands were half frozen, yet her sole thought was to keep the child warm,—her son—whom she had caught up in her excitement. A boy four years old is a heavy burthen for any woman,—even his mother ; yesterday her arms could scarcely have lifted him without aching, now a sudden reaction seemed to have endowed her nerves with strength such as she never had felt before. The poor creature had some idea of taking refuge in her brother's house, but her brain was so bewildered at first that she could not remember where it was, and she wandered up and down the streets, hardly knowing what she did. There seemed not to be a soul out that bitter January night, save herself ; she met no one. At last she heard twelve o'clock tolled out sombre and slowly ; in the darkness the sound echoing and re-echoing seemed to come down from the clouds ; she stopped with the snow eddying round her face till the sound died away. Had it not been for the child, she thought she must have thrown herself down in one of the drifts and tried to die there ; at last, half dead with cold and fatigue, she made her way to the door she was in search of. As she—still holding the child—attempted to catch at the snow-covered railings and to ring the bell, her strength failed her ; she sank on her knees, while a great flash of fire reeled all around her in the night. For the first time that evening a sudden realization of her husband

and what she had done to him dawned on her startled senses. She had killed him, and was a murderess! In that one word every horrible story of guilt and criminality seemed flashed across her mind. Once again she attempted to get on her feet, but this time lost consciousness and fell in a swoon.

Being a studious man, Mr. Blackoder seldom retired till after midnight; and now, as he sat up searching over one of his great legal books, his attention was roused by a most pitiful wail which rose out of the solitude and darkness of the street below. A snowstorm is profoundly silent: but he thought at first the noise he heard must be the wailing of the wind,—it was too inarticulate and shrill for a human voice. Then it recommenced too distinctly to be mistaken for anything but the cry of a child. He frowned and tried to resume his interrupted studies; he had no great sympathy with vagrants, and, besides, the workhouse was not more than half a mile off.

But, for all he could do, that imploring cry would keep on ringing in his ears till it grew so importunate that, opening the window, he put his head out and looked down. The sleet blew past in his face, blinding him. The cry still continued.

It was, or seemed, on the steps of his own house, but nothing could be seen. He shuddered, then taking a candle up he went to the door. As he opened it, the dim light he carried made visible to him a startling sight. A woman, partly covered with a blanket and half buried in the drifting snow, had fallen on the steps; a half-naked child that she had been carrying in the blanket—that she had caught up.

out of its bed with it—seemed to have uncovered itself to keep its mother warm, and was lying on her breast, piteously screaming with its arms round her neck.

As the flickering light fell on this woman's face he saw that it was his sister's! nor did the two or three drops of *red* with which her sleeve was stained escape his keen eyes. He had not seen her for three years.

He took the insensible form in his arms, and with an effort got her up into the room where he had been sitting; the child followed by itself, still wailing in mingled terror and pain. Then he roused his household. Before he could go up to tell her, his own wife appeared in the room, and found him chafing the hands and forehead of a woman. Without a word of explanation he rushed out and brought back a medical man from the next street. When Mrs. Helmore recovered from the swoon which she had been overtaken by, she was delirious and seemingly in a brain-fever. All that night they had to watch by her; but there was something in her wild senseless utterances that so startled and arrested her brother's attention that, *prima luce*, he started off through the snow to make inquiries at his brother-in-law's house.

The whole place was in confusion: but he was somewhat reassured; though the only information he could obtain was to the effect that Mr. Helmore had met with a severe accident, and had given orders for no one to be admitted. In reality the knife with which his wife had retaliated upon his brutality, had glanced off one of his ribs; and, beyond the fright which had caused him to faint, had made, in spite of the blood that had been seen, only a slight wound; but for this and the blow he got falling

against the baluster, there was no great injury done him. He was evidently only too glad to conceal the story—though it became known everywhere in spite of him. There had been a witness, and besides, any one who had listened at the bedside during Mrs. Helmore's ensuing illness, would have been pretty well acquainted with the case, though exaggerated exceedingly, for she never seemed to doubt for an instant that she had killed him.

The first time the people about her mentioned her husband as a living man, she started and turned deadly pale, but she never mentioned his name again. A deed of separation was drawn up between them shortly afterwards, though it was nearly six weeks before Mrs. Helmore could be termed convalescent. £300 a year was allowed her under this deed (drawn up for her by her brother), and so at last she seemed about to gain a little peace.

But it was not long ere Mr. Blackoder saw that the irrevocable hand of death was upon her; she was indeed in a decline, though neither she herself nor others than he observed it at that time. She lived entirely alone, but for her child, whom she loved passionately,—scarce setting her eyes on another soul, save her brother: for she had a morbid objection to strange faces. Thus his strong mind, taking advantage of her maternal hopes and fears, obtained an influence over the dying desponding woman, impossible to be exaggerated. In many instances she felt as though she could no more have helped doing what he wanted of her than a splinter of iron can resist a lodestone. At that time he must have acted unconsciously, from mere force of habit, for he could have little knowledge of how it was to serve

him. More than a year passed in this way, when with abrupt suddenness, the news came that her husband had committed suicide; and, strange to say, this seemed as great a shock to her, as though she had still been living with him, and passionately devoted to him.

He had left a will, made in the early days of his married life, before the birth of his son, by which, having no relatives, a large property left by him came undisputed to his widow. But it was only with the utmost difficulty that her brother could persuade her into taking possession of it.

Now comes the strangest part of the story, for, thinking herself about to die, Mrs. Helmore one day executed a will. At the same time an extraordinary idea came like a flash across her brother's subtle brain; in a moment he had made his calculations and resolved to act on them. His daughter Louise was then a child scarcely of three years, only two years younger than the cousin who had become her companion. He resolved that they should be engaged to each other, young as they were. By subtle innuendoes and suggestions, he so worked upon his sister's weak hysterical nature that she came at last to have the same wish. The will of which an abstract has already been given was the result.

Poor creature! What malign sinister influence and weariness had persuaded her into doing this? The power a strong mind has over a weak one becomes something terrible to reflect on if one considers to what aims and purposes it can be rendered subservient. And in her deluded eyes this was an absolute necessity! And all the while she was passionately devoted to her son's welfare!

And when she should leave this world his uncle was to be appointed his guardian !

How he acted in that capacity, and what use he made of this Will, the next chapter will show.

CHAPTER XII.

FACE TO FACE.

"LOUISE, my dear ! I have certain matters to discuss with your cousin, since he has at last condescended to pay us a visit ; for the present you had possibly better leave me."

The young man thus alluded to rose at this and opened the door near him.

Meanwhile Miss Blackoder in a half-bewildered way had risen too.

Her father's voice appeared to have startled her out of some deep reverie into which she had fallen.—Her lips trembled unconsciously, her cheeks turned a deep red—then paler than ever : in spite of her good looks, there was something very strange in her face at that moment. Louise Blackoder's was evidently a type of the nature that lives in a perpetual change from one source of anxiety to another—in a constant anticipation of some yet unbeheld, though ever expected evil ; of the nature whose nerves are overstrained in short, as was so plainly the case with hers now. Her features were pallid, naturally perhaps ; the contrast between her crisp black hair and her delicate

complexion made her paler still; the rich black-velvet dress she wore serving to display this contrast in an even more marked form. But she rinsed her slender hands, drying them again, and preparing to quit the room without a word.

Even then there was a mingled expression of reluctance and fear in her eyes; for reaching the open door, she paused, looking back as though she half intended to speak and yet dared not.

The next instant, however, she was gone.

It was evident that she had paused once or twice outside, as though she would fain have overheard the first words of their expected conversation whatever they might be. At last the drawing-room door overhead opened and closed again; while the sound of a piano grew audible there, which—delicate as it was in touch—showed plainly how little she could be thinking of the music that found expression in it. But as this began, her father left his chair and looked out at the door through which she had disappeared. The hall was all lonely and silent save for the faint vibration of the music upstairs; no servant remained there who could overhear anything in the dining-room where Mr. Blackoder and his nephew sat, and he came inside again reassured.

As the lawyer moved stealthily about the dark walls, the ostentatious ruby studs in his shirt-front flashed and emitted brilliant sparkles of light; then he reseated himself, taking this time the chair Louise had quitted at the head of the table. He was in full evening dress. Through the scentless exotic plants of the window-sills, the sultry summer air streamed in over their faces, laden with desultory

rumours and street-cries :—well under the London horizon as the sun must have been by then, a faint flash of light still fell on the foliage fronting the windows, serving to prolong the gloomy half-light in which these two sat looking at each other, with their faces vaguely reflected in the dark table they leant on. Mr. Blackoder no longer lived in the little Gower Street square, memorable to us by his sister's death ; this present house seemed bigger altogether, though still situated in a square somewhat like the other. Tavistock and Torrington Squares are different places in more than one sense of the word. But facing each other as the uncle and nephew were, Mr. Blackoder still had the advantage, for he sat with his back to the light and his face was indistinguishable. The only features really visible in it were the eyes, which (catching, perhaps, the dim reflections of the great silver *épergne*) glowed under their overhanging brows with a keen motionless gleam ; until Stephen Helmore, fronting him, seemed to have grown utterly ill at ease under the deep scrutiny his own were thus subjected to.

One thing the uncle appeared determined on,—and this was, not to speak first.

“ See, your silence,
Cunning in dumbness, from my weakness draws
My very soul of counsel.”

“ Well, sir ? ” stammered the nephew at last, after some little time spent in this uncomfortable fashion.

At the same moment Louise's music overhead abruptly died away, as if the player (aware in some mysterious way of the silence now broken between them) had paused, straining every nerve to catch their words.

It was a mere coincidence, however, for ere the uncle answered him she had begun again.

"I am not what I used to be, Stephen," he suddenly commenced: "many symptoms about me have arrested my attention of late; I can no longer sit up, working night and day for a week to earn five pounds. I am a rich man now and dearly have I paid for it!"

"I hope not, sir."

"We are all growing old now; I should like much to see you settled firmly in life, before long, Stephen."

"And I too, sir."

"I am truly thankful to hear it, then. But pardon me a moment."

As the lawyer spoke he rose once more, taking from his pocket a bunch of keys with which he went to the mantelpiece, where he lit a small wax taper.

Holding this he crossed the room and stopped opposite a ponderous escritoire which stood in the corner there.

"This was once your mother's, Stephen," he observed, turning round for a moment: "I have had it done up since. It doesn't look so big here as it did in her room, poor thing! I shall never forget the last words she uttered there, though."

"What—what were they, sir?"

"Something connected with yourself, Stephen,—but a moment, please!"

The next instant the upper door of this escritoire flew back at his touch, disclosing a second door which he also unlocked, secured as it was with a steel padlock. Out of one of the numerous drawers inside he drew a folded paper. This done he came back to his chair and speaking slowly

and deliberately, he leant across the table handing the document to his listener: but at the same moment a sudden exclamation escaped his lips and without an instant's hesitation he withdrew it again ere the other had time to relinquish his hold on it. This was done so abruptly that several of the glasses in front of him were upset.

Stephen, as one might imagine, looked up in some astonishment at the abruptness of this strange behaviour; Mr. Blackoder with his cold grey restless eyes hidden in the gleam of his spectacles, and with hands which seemed to tremble slightly, was examining the folded paper he had snatched away. Something had undoubtedly occurred to disturb him.

"Are you ill, sir?" said Stephen.

And at that moment their eyes met again. The old man looked steadily in his nephew's face, and while doing so held the paper up in the light as though to consult it. An acute psychologist might have thought he wished to avoid any suspicion of his desiring to conceal it.

"Excuse me," he said, "but this is not the paper I wished to give you. We lawyers often have closed documents in our safe keeping, and if the seals should chance to be—but there is no harm done. Shall I have the lamps lighted?"

Now, in spite of the nonchalance with which he spoke, there was something in the tone of his voice which seemed to show that he was not half so much at ease as he desired to appear.

"As you please, sir," answered Stephen, still looking at him.

"I should prefer the dark; too much light tires my

eyes:"—the lawyer broke off with a constrained smile flickering for a moment over his face, and so leant forward, extinguishing a candle he had just lighted from the taper.

* * * * *

"And now, Stephen, to business, as we say in the city. When on her deathbed, your mother imposed a great and solemn duty on me with regard to yourself. What this is you know. It now wants but three weeks till you come of age,—in two weeks Louise herself will be nineteen; and I can't help thinking—as indeed I mentioned the last time we met—that (all things considered) it must be high time—"

But with these last word on his tongue, the lawyer's slow deliberate voice came to a stop; leaving a dead silence in the apartment.

He left the rest of what he would have said delicately to his nephew's imagination.

"You understand me, I presume, Stephen?"

Yet the nephew answered not a syllable; the deep respirations with which he drew in his breath alone were audible.

"Dear, dear me! you seem strangely modest all of a sudden," resumed the uncle, pausing again.

"I have a very dim recollection of my mother, sir," began the other abruptly. "For I saw but little of her up to the last almost—"

"You were away at the time."

"I was. But you may possibly remember how I spent two days with her when she was so well again, just before her death."

"Perfectly. And also that the doctors said your presence at that time was fraught with considerable danger to her, Stephen."

"Anyhow, sir, it was during that time that my mother explained to me the existence of her present will, the meaning of which I scarcely comprehended at the time,—I only remembered her words and understood them long afterwards; but to my dying hour I shall never forget the way in which she told me she meant to destroy and efface the conditions of this will I mention. She did *not* it appears; but I have reasons now, sir,—very deep immovable reasons—to wish sincerely she *had* carried out the promise she made me, and which I then understood so imperfectly."

"What, Stephen?"

Saying this, Mr. Blackoder started upright in his chair, pushing the glass aside to make room for his arms on the table.

"I have never ventured previously to address you in this way, only within the last six months have I desired to—"

"The last six months?"

"Have I desired to, sir: indeed I know, as you have often led me to see, how my whole future depends on my passive acquiescence to your will."

"Your mother's, Stephen, your mother's you mean."

"To yours and my mother's then. I know this only too well. When you last mentioned the subject I evaded it as best I could: you now leave me no longer the possibility of evasion. Deeply as I respect and honour the memory of my mother, and yourself, I can still never have the

faintest shadow of partiality or love for your daughter, sir, nor can she ever have for me, indeed."

"Am I to understand you as desiring to break off your engagement, from what you say?"

Mr. Blackoder asked this quite suddenly; quitting the tone of utter surprise he had previously made use of, and without the slightest modulation in his manner or voice.

He was still leaning on the table, rubbing his hands together softly.

"You absolutely mean me to understand this?" he continued.

But there was still not a word in reply. The nephew indeed seemed losing his presence of mind again.

"What you say, Stephen, is true in a certain sense, I admit."

"How so, sir?"

"Why in this, Stephen; that poor Louise has been intensely piqued at the studied negligence with which, even I, have noticed you to treat her within the last six months you allude to, and has perhaps not hesitated to show you this. But I think I understand enough of the female character to pronounce that a few of the slightest attentions on your part would dissipate this feeling again. If you consider her really averse to you, you either wilfully misrepresent the case or you are totally in conversant with the state of her feelings."

"Are you certain of this, sir?"

"I am, Stephen, and I am deeply glad of it."

Again there was an ominous pause between them.

"Sir," exclaimed Stephen, speaking at last, "I can no longer conceal my intentions from you."

"What may they be?"

"That it is not possible for this marriage to take place, sir; and that nothing shall induce me to consent to it!"

"Indeed! you *have* taken me by surprise, Stephen."

Crayston Blackoder's voice, dignified and impassive, contrasted strangely with the excited tone in which his nephew spoke.

Nothing could have exceeded the force of this contrast, indeed.

"This then is your final decision, Stephen?"

Both had risen as he said this.

"It is, sir!"

"This, Stephen, is a copy of your mother's will I have procured for you this morning. I recommend it to your perusal."

And as he spoke he walked round the table to where his nephew stood, and handed him the paper mentioned.

Stephen took it without a word. The taper on the table still lit them up dimly; but there was an extraordinary silence in the gloomy room, for the movements of their chairs or feet made no noise on the thick soft carpet its floors were lined with.

"Stephen," recommenced the uncle suddenly, "come up to my room with me, I have something still to say to you." This time his voice seemed to tremble slightly.

"No, sir, I will leave you now. Any further interview between us on this subject could but be productive of pain to us both."

"Give me your hand, Stephen!"

"I am sorry to have moved you, sir, in this abrupt way."

"To have moved me? Good God, Stephen! What can a man do but be moved when his whole life-projects have broken down in half an hour?"

"I can only say—"

"Say? What can you say? Can you ever say or even guess all I have gone through equally for your sake and my daughter's, Stephen? The days and nights of—of agony—of toil I mean—which all end like this! I gave up my whole thoughts to you and her, and I am punished for it!"

"You are not the only sufferer, sir, for my conduct."

"I am determined not to be."

"Then good-night, sir!"

"You will not stop as I asked you?"

"No, sir! it would be no use."

"You still have the paper I gave you?"

"I have, sir."

"Will you give me any explanation of this extraordinary resolution, Stephen?"

"At present I cannot, sir!"

"Then good-night to you, Stephen!"

In another moment Crayston had turned back across the room to the fire-place, where he rang the bell.

Simultaneously with the loud peal which vibrated from the basement the music overhead, still vaguely heard at times, came to a stop. Then a startled movement occurred on the floor of the room in which the piano stood.

Some one up there appeared to have opened the door and come out on to the landing-place, as though to listen better.

Presently the door of the dining-room itself sprang open.

"Get my lamp ready, Loader, I have to write to-night." said the master of the house in his usual short suppressed tone.

Then he glanced hastily round him, and saw that Stephen had quitted the apartment while he spoke.

Was he gone?

The servant meanwhile had disappeared noiselessly down stairs again. The master at this went out into the hall which was empty. Just at that moment he distinguished a faint whisper in the room overhead, and with a gleam in his eyes he turned aside up the staircase, gliding stealthily like an animal almost, till he got near enough to overhear what it was that had attracted him.

His daughter and nephew were there together.

At the door then he paused, and bent down listening.

"I only came up for my hat, Louise," exclaimed one.

The other muttered something inaudible.

"It's all past now, you need'nt look so terrified. I got the letter you sent me; if you knew all, you'd have seen but little necessity to compromise yourself by writing it!"

"Hush! You have not consented to—to—"

"Marry you? No! I'll starve first!"

"Oh thank God!" exclaimed the girl at this. "Oh Stephen! Stephen! if *you* knew all that I know, if my poor, poor mother were only alive to—!"

But as these words hung on her lips, Louise Blackoder saw that her father had entered the room and was looking at her.

Turning dizzily to meet him her strength seemed sud-

denly to fall her ; for she tottered back and sank on to one of the couches in the room, while a violent fit of trembling passed through all her limbs ; ere she could utter a word, her cousin had quitted the room again and was halfway downstairs.

The next moment and the street door opened, slammed-to heavily, and he was gone.

Then she lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. BLACKODER.

MR. BLACKODER went on to the landing-place and called out loudly for assistance. The whole household was alarmed. Louise's own maid ran up first ; and, seeing how matters stood, fetched a decanter from below, with the contents of which she began to sprinkle her mistress's pallid face and shut eyelids. In a little while the young lady came-to again.

She stood up on her feet, looking round the sumptuously-furnished room in a bewildered way, until she suddenly became aware of the presence of her father, who was standing close by, with his deep-set eyes fixed on her. At this she became so weak and ill again that she staggered, and seemed about to fall, and, perhaps, might even have done so, but for the girl's assistance.

"Louise," said the old man, in a perfectly calm voice, "you had better, perhaps, go to bed. I think your mistress

is not well," he continued, speaking to the young servant.

"No, sir, Miss Louise *is not!*" exclaimed the girl with hardly concealed indignation; for she seemed to sympathise with her young mistress as far as she openly dared.

Louise was leaning heavily on her maid's arm, and the two seemed now about to leave the room together. But just as they had managed to reach the door, the old lawyer called his daughter back. "Louise," he cried, "as I am not likely to see you again to-night, you had better kiss me."

The poor girl tottered dizzily round, came to where her father stood, and kissed him timidly. Then she turned away again.

As she was going upstairs with her maid, he heard her burst out crying bitterly, as though her very heart were about to break. Her wild and hysterical sobs resounded through the whole house.

A strange household this old man had gathered about him, certainly!

When the place grew a little quieter he went downstairs and called for his lamp. Loader brought it for him, and placed it in his dining-room, where his master's mysterious escritoire stood. He received directions to order the coachman round at half-past eight the next morning, and was then dismissed.

The glasses and remnants of the dessert had all been cleared away off the table, for it was long past eleven o'clock. The shutters were up in the ground-floor windows, and the alarm-bells were made fast to them. The whole lower part of the house grew dark and silent, the lights were put out now, and the servants seemed to have gone to

their beds. But it was a habit of their master to sit up late; for he was a hard worker, and liked to be left in peace.

He had locked himself up in the dining-room where his lamp had been placed; and was now slowly pacing from one end to the other of it, with his hands clasped behind his back, and his head bowed down so low that his chin rested on his breast.

There was a deep frown on his brow, and his spectacles gleamed wildly.

Every now and then he would unclasp his hands, and begin gesticulating with one of them in an extravagant manner, so that it almost appeared as though he were conversing or arguing with the great black shadow which changed place, and followed him about so continually over the walls and floor. This shadow had to adapt itself to all sorts of corners and crevices in the room; but it flitted about over the chairs and tables, and never left him for one instant.

When this had gone on for nearly half an hour, he suddenly stopped short, and taking the lamp off the table, he came and stood opposite the cupboard in the corner.

He put the light down on the writing-ledge, and unlocked its outer door cautiously. At the same time with his left hand he pulled the folded paper out of his pocket, where it had remained since he had snatched it away from his nephew with such scant courtesy. He seemed quite breathless with excitement, and his lips quivered tremulously.

Just at the instant he was doing this, some mysterious

and almost unaccountable noise occurred quite close to him. It caused him to start back.

Instinctively he thrust away and concealed the paper inside his coat; while the perspiration started out, gleaming in big drops on his brow. With his face grown pale all over, he stood still, listening intently. His heart beat and palpitated in such a way that for a few seconds it seemed to drown every other sound near him.

Yet everything had undoubtedly become silent again in the room: one might have heard even a pin drop. Presently the slow, measured step of a policeman passed by on the pavement; and, after a minute or two, Mr. Blackoder seemed to recover confidence. His one great fear seemed to be that some one must have been watching him. But no; the noise which had disturbed him could only have been produced by his own fearful imagination. "It's nothing—nothing! My nerves are out of order," he muttered out loud, as if to reassure himself by the sound of his voice.

But before doing anything else, he took up the lamp again, and went and looked carefully behind the heavy velvet curtains at the windows. There could be nothing there, and he came back, taking up the keys in order to finish unlocking the doors.

He had the paper in his hand again now; and was just about to press with his finger and thumb on the spring which opened the door he had before taken it out of, when he paused.

"No! no!" he suddenly exclaimed, speaking to himself, "I must act *now* or *never*. Who knows what might happen? My brain's not what it used to be, or I should never have drifted into such a blunder as I made to-night.

Good God! another minute more and he might have learn. . .”

He stopped short, leaving the last word only half-pronounced, as though he had become aware of something slightly ridiculous in his thus carrying on a conversation with himself. He wiped his brow with his red-silk handkerchief, and then caught up the lamp for the third time, and went stealthily to the fireplace, in the fender of which he deposited it.

He next dragged all the green and golden shavings, and fire-ornaments out of the grate itself. There was a large pile of old dirty newspaper underneath, which he eagerly seized and shook the soot out of. He arranged these papers in one compact mass, over which he poured the unctuous contents of a salad-oil bottle, which he discovered in the cruet-stand on the sideboard.

As may be imagined, the contents of the grate, in this way, made up a heap of highly inflammable material.

He set fire to this.

Next he rushed back across the room, and snatched up the document which he had left on the ledge of the *escritoire*. Another moment, and he was leaning eagerly over the fire in the grate. His black, distorted shadow rose simultaneously on to the ceiling over his head, swerving madly from side to side in the lurid flaring light cast out of the fireplace. It seemed as though the bad side of his nature, his evil genius, were at last triumphant.

He was holding out the paper into the very centre of the blaze; the flames were licking round it hungrily, and in another instant it might have been consumed.

But there was another fate in store for it. Just as he

was on the point of letting go his hold, an enigmatical and mysterious noise, exactly similar to the one which had before alarmed him, now smote for the second time upon his guilty ear.

There could be no mistake about it now. The sound was loud and prolonged, coming distinctly from the back of the *escritoire*. There was a wild and startling outcry—something between a hiss and a growl—followed by a long scuffle: some person seemed to be concealed there, and struggling desperately to escape.

The noise grew even louder; there was a perfect yell, which his morbid and conscience-stricken sense of hearing magnified and exaggerated into a sound such as never mortal ears had heard before.

Still grasping the paper in his hand, he dashed across the room. His very hair seemed to stand on end—his shadow to tremble!

The next instant, as he stood there, too horrified to move or speak, three large black kittens rolled head-over-heels from behind the great piece of furniture, and out into the middle of the room, where, with their green eyes flashing and their tails erected, they commenced a violent struggle for mastery over the body of a dead mouse, which they were mauling about in their teeth and claws, and growling over. Presently they were followed by their mother; who, however, fled back again, leaving her progeny to fight the battle out by themselves, when she caught sight of the master of the house standing there.

In her Mr. Blackoder recognised a large house-cat which lived down in the area and basement by daytime, and prowled about the upper rooms of the house at night.

There is a profound poetry about a cat ; it loves mystery and solitude with all the devotion its dumb inarticulate soul is master of.

While he looked on at these animals, and before he could recover from the horror and astonishment they had occasioned him, the shadow, cast by his figure on to the opposite wall, died suddenly away ; for the fire in the grate had burnt itself out. At the same time the overpowered light of the lamp once more asserted itself, causing this shadow of his to reappear in another quarter of the apartment.

The document, the attempted destruction of which had caused him all this fear and trouble, still remained intact within his trembling grasp. He leant down beside the lamp examining it, and saw that its surface was slightly burnt and singed in one place, and that was all. He next turned looking at the grate, in which there was no sign of life left now, save for a few brilliant sparks which were travelling about among the blackened tinder.

Even these extinguished themselves in a little while, and then all was over.

The old lawyer sighed heavily, and began to replace the gaudily-coloured shavings between the hot bars. He arranged them all with great caution and exactitude, in order that none of the household might suspect what had been going on that night. The smell of the oil had fortunately been carried off with the smoke up the chimney.

When he had done this to his satisfaction, he gave the fireplace a few finishing touches, carefully blew away a piece of tinder which had fallen outside the fender, and

then got up with the lamp in his hand, and walked across to where his cabinet stood.

The doors were open, just as he had left them. The inner drawer sprang back at his touch, and in it he deposited the fire-scathed document.

Quick as thought he slammed it to again, and locked the two outer doors. All this was done and over in an instant, and afterwards he seemed to breathe more freely.

Once more he went back to the fireplace, examining every angle and crevice of it, in order to be certain there could not be the vaguest trace left of the late conflagration, and being satisfied with appearances, he went to the door, unlocked it, and began to step heavily upstairs to his bedroom on the second-floor. He still carried the lamp in one hand, while with the other he held on to the balusters, for he appeared to be utterly overcome with fatigue and agitation.

The clock in the hall struck one just as he reached his room and closed the door.

Then, save for the ticking of this clock, the lower part of the house grew utterly silent; while the cat and her kittens were left to wander from room to room at will, and without further disturbance.

CHAPTER XIV.

OVER THE HORIZON.

"33 South Moulton Street, London,
November 22nd, 1847.

"My dear Stanwise,

"The storm has burst at last and is over again now—thank God! I am a married man! You know that on the Saturday you left, I was summoned to dine with Mr. Blackoder. At that time I hadn't the vaguest idea he knew of the Rochester imbroglio: but I found afterwards he knew as of much it as I or you did. Agnes's uncle is connected with him in some mysterious way (how I can't quite make out). When I followed your sudden advice in the matter and told her my position, her cousin overheard her and repeated our conversation to him; on which he wrote to my uncle post-haste, so that the latter was conversant with the whole story; two days after, and ere my final interview with him. Of course, as I told you, the Saturday you left, I and my uncle came to a final rupture.

"Poor Agnes's position after that became utterly unbearable. Her cousin never quitted her for an instant, perpetually urging the insane stories I told you of that night—her uncle became a perfect demon seemingly: he tried to lock her in her room, and actually kept her there for three days—he threatened her with a stick: in short when I next managed to get an interview with her, she was more dead than alive. We had not met for five weeks then—I saw these two brutes were killing her between them. She was fully of

age; and three weeks after, she left the house quite, and we were married. It was a profound relief to me, I can tell you.

"We came immediately to London—(for in the meantime I had written to the War-Office and got my commission cancelled after Saturday night): and on the way up a singular idea struck me. I made up my mind to turn artist. It was the first time such a plan occurred to me—it was inspiration in brief, and I resolved forthwith to act on it. You know I have always possessed a certain artistic talent—witness the portrait I still possess of yourself. I have had lessons in sufficiency before now and have ruined much good paper—you may doubtless remember the person who gave them in Rochester—James Patterson the landscape painter. I had always possessed a deep curiosity in any exhibition or pictures I ever came across: anyhow now my determination was fixed and I grew enthusiastic on the spot. Four hundred pounds I obtained by the sale of my commission—a hundred and fifty pounds I had at the time: this properly laid out was enough to live upon for four years. The moment I could spare time enough I wrote to my old drawing-master, who answered me saying the best thing I could do in the world would be to article myself to his brother—who would require me to pay down fifty pounds, and five annually, and would then keep me in his studio as long as I desired; with the benefit of his instruction. I jumped at this naturally—paid the money down—and for the last week have been working in the brother's studio—who is a man of very enormous talent, his friends say. He is a very eccentric person, as they all seem—anyhow I will let you know more of our ways of life ere long. I have utterly

broken with my uncle now of course. I wrote to him on the day of my marriage and received no answer: since which it has been legally notified to me that no further communications can take place between any member of his family or mine. My mother's will as it stands then has cut me off without so much as a shilling to bless myself with—so we are forced to live very economically for the present. I fear nothing for the future—I am ready to face the Devil himself with only Agnes beside me. 'Hang toasts!' as we used to say. I won't use the complimentary language you were so famous in your aversion to—but that you may never be less confident or worse satisfied with yourself than I is the heartiest wish of

"Your Affectionate friend,

"STEPHEN HELMORE."

CHAPTER XV.

MAN AND HIS CONSCIENCE.

THERE still exists a sketch in pencil,—in the possession of some friend or relative—by an artist* who died comparatively young—a sketch entitled “Man and his Conscience,” which represents two wild-visaged figures, stark-stripped and running swiftly down the damp sand of a desolate sea-beach ; one in the footsteps of the other. It might have been designed by Michelangelo. The waves are an inspiration in themselves ; wild, cold, and inveterate, a few strokes of the pencil have set them dashing and surging for ever. Behind, the sky—grey, dumb, speech-bound as it were, “awearied with all her wings,”—leans vaporously on the horizon and rests there. The whole sketch is filled with the monotony and foam-speckled desolation of these waves, and with the steel-grey frozen neutrality of the horizon beyond ;—with the sense of movement and of gradually quickening flight. You can hear the waves hiss through the pebbles—the wind whistle round the limbs and the nakedness of the fugitives. And nothing else save these two figures visible, — subtly designed : incredibly swift in action ; one running in the other’s footsteps. Where will

* David Scott, R.S.A.

the race end?—Will the pursuer ever look fully in the eyes of the pursued, as he strains to do, even now?—Will the foremost be forced to remove the convulsive fingers from his ears?—Will the one who follows unburthen his tight-shut lips at last? None can tell! It may perhaps be they will face each other in some final goal (out of sight now and to all eternity)—where the fatal sea, rising, will have driven them in, till they can run no further—where they may be friends at last: while the waves will sweep them away in their embraces and their reconciliation, even as it now consumes the mutual footprints of their hostility and flight.

This sketch is an epitome of the human mind—what soul so guiltless who has not undergone these struggles once?

But in the modern civilization a mask has been laid upon all the interior ways of the soul; the soul's struggles take place in secret, and the face smiles openly. Inside the soul all the terrible horizon of sea and cloud unfolds itself—the soul's conscience and the soul's accuser walk there together, and the soul itself looks on with ghastly sickening distrust: the brain tingles and booms, the eyes leer suspiciously, for how is it possible that things so visible to one mind are not real and visible to all others? How can it be that the secret which burns for ever on the lips, has never yet found utterance—unconsciously in sleep,—in momentary forgetfulness? No. The soul flies, the accuser pursues: and the soul (the body's identity) day after day follows its occupations, and mingles in the turmoil of the city and the haunts of its fellow-men—each with his own heart gnawing perhaps:—and the world turns over

and over, and fresh men are born and the old die off again.

But it is a result of civilization, that no man having once done wrong can escape the moral consequences of his action—unless indeed he be not mentally responsible for it: unless his mind be deranged—for the nerves vibrate perpetually to it, and the brain never forgets its wrong-doing. The punishment is so severe for infringement of the laws in force, the fall so terrible, the mingling of the mental and physical agony so intense—and discovery above all so easy, so overwhelmingly imminent—that there can be no rest after; save in the severest toil and bodily ailment.

Few men perhaps had worked harder than Crayston Blackoder. He had shrunk from no toil that was worth the working for—his nervous system had been strained in every possible way: left destitute in his very childhood he had entered a middle-class legal firm and had become one of the first, and most looked-up-to men in his profession. His wife was long dead—his daughter and nephew seemed utterly under his control—who among all mankind was to know he had concealed his sister's codicil, and being afraid to destroy it in his wife's lifetime had lost nerve and kept it ever since? Who could be aware of this fact? And yet somehow he had never felt at ease since . . . It had all been done for his daughter's sake: no one could analyse the affection in which he held her: the wild unreasoning love as of some animal for its offspring—the passion, the one object of his love.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST; IN WHICH MANY THINGS ARE UNFOLDED.

AT the end of our last chapter we had brought our three principal characters—those three out of whose conflicting inclinations, this our narrative most takes its rise—to the summit of their respective paths: Helmore's and his love's primary object in life was accomplished in the fact of their union; and Blackoder's criminality had been till then successful and secret. But from this point their ways led downwards. The lovers' road downwards swiftly; and with few breaks or turnings till seemingly the lowest attainable level was reached, and despair seemed to encompass them: but for a way out of it and upwards which was unexpectedly disclosed. The lawyer's path led lower, and yet lower till. . . .

But we must begin telling *how* and in few words; for the conclusion is imminent. Helmore, as his letter to his friend indicated, continued to work at art for three or four years; he sold some small pictures to dealers and to friends for small prices, and his hopes were high, but as his money gradually failed him, so his commissions fell off; for they never had had any solid foundation in artistic reputation.—His rich friends got tired of him, and his artistic ones could not help him any longer, and he by degrees fell into abject poverty. Blackoder had cut off all communication between the families, and Stanwise was in India: then Helmore fell ill. In this extremity Agnes wrote to her uncle and

cousin imploring for aid, and received back taunting replies from the half-insane cousin.

Goaded to desperation, in want of the commonest necessities, and her husband perhaps dying, Agnes went to a shop she was in the habit of dealing at, with some vague intention of asking for credit. Now comes the saddest episode in our story, the deepest, most humbling degradation. On the counter, at which she was waiting to be served, Agnes espied a bright-looking half-crown. There was nobody near that part of the shop, and the coin had evidently been forgotten there by some hurried customer: no one would even miss it! The lure glittered and fascinated her. In an instant she had seized on the shining bait and hurried away from the shop.—But a shop-girl was watching her, and the coin *was marked*. Agnes hurried along with her ears singing, her pulse palpitating, and her face white with emotion. What had she done? She had changed in one instant her whole life's nature—she had disgraced her husband—she was *a thief*. She hardly noticed the dense fog which masked all the thoroughfares and rendered pursuit hopeless. She turned and resolved to go back and restore the money at all hazards. But scarcely was this resolve set in action, when, in an instant, out of the density of the fog, appeared two policemen, several boys, and one or two others—and the shop-girl who had been watching her—one who had frequently served her.

She was forthwith taken before a magistrate, and the evidence seemed clear enough. But the worthy London magistrate saw something in the manner of the accused, and the looks of the chief witness against her, that bred some doubts in his mind, and he remanded her. Her poor

husband from his sick-bed flew to the cell where his wife was detained. His love for her seemed greater than before, though his honour appeared gone. But the lowest was here reached. Returning home he found a letter from Stanwise, notifying his immediate return from India, and enclosing £20. On Helmore's having employed a lawyer, it transpired that the shop-girl who had accused his wife had herself been robbing her employers for a long time—her room and boxes being found full of their property. On this the shopkeepers became alarmed; from the lawyer it got known that the lady accused was the wife of an officer in the army. The shop-girl might herself have adroitly slipped the marked coin into her muff or purse. The accused had been found returning towards the shop, as she averred to return the coin. They hurriedly informed the magistrate of what they had discovered, and dropped the charge. In the ineffable relief that our young couple felt at this lucky turn of events, as may be imagined, they did not trouble about any counter-charge: the events which now rapidly succeeded one another were too engrossing.

Stanwise who it seems had gone to India in order that by making a fortune he might marry Louise Blackoder (to whom indeed he had been engaged even before his departure), had, on the pressing solicitations of that young lady, just returned, her father's singular behaviour having been a cause of the gravest solicitude to her for some months. He had firearms in the house, even under his very pillow when in bed; he neglected his business entirely, and spent his whole time in trying to unravel plots which seemed only to exist in his own imagination; he

would wander over the house in the night, talking to himself, till his daughter's existence grew unbearable to her. He was mostly quite white in the face, except indeed when, at times, he used to fortify his nerves with brandy and wine against—Heaven only knew what unpleasant and never-made domiciliary visits of policemen or others. At last things came to a climax. For several days Mr. Blackoder had noticed, with ever-increasing terror and indignation, a very harmless-looking young man, who used to walk up and down in front of the house, early in the morning, and at day-fall. He was indeed a clerk, who was in love with one of the maid-servants of a neighbouring house. Blackoder, now become insane, followed the unfortunate man into what seemed a fit locality, and from behind *shot him dead!* There being no cause for this, nor any connection between the parties, Blackoder was never suspected; but, the event having occurred in his own neighbourhood, by an evil chance he was summoned to appear on the jury at the coroner's inquest. An evil chance in truth this was, for the lawyer by his profession was exempt; but in the diseased state of his imagination he set this blunder down to the machinations of his enemies, who Hamlet-like would try the effect of such a scene upon his nerves. He determined therefore to brazen it out: but during the inquest began to rave: and entirely losing his wits had to be lodged in an asylum.

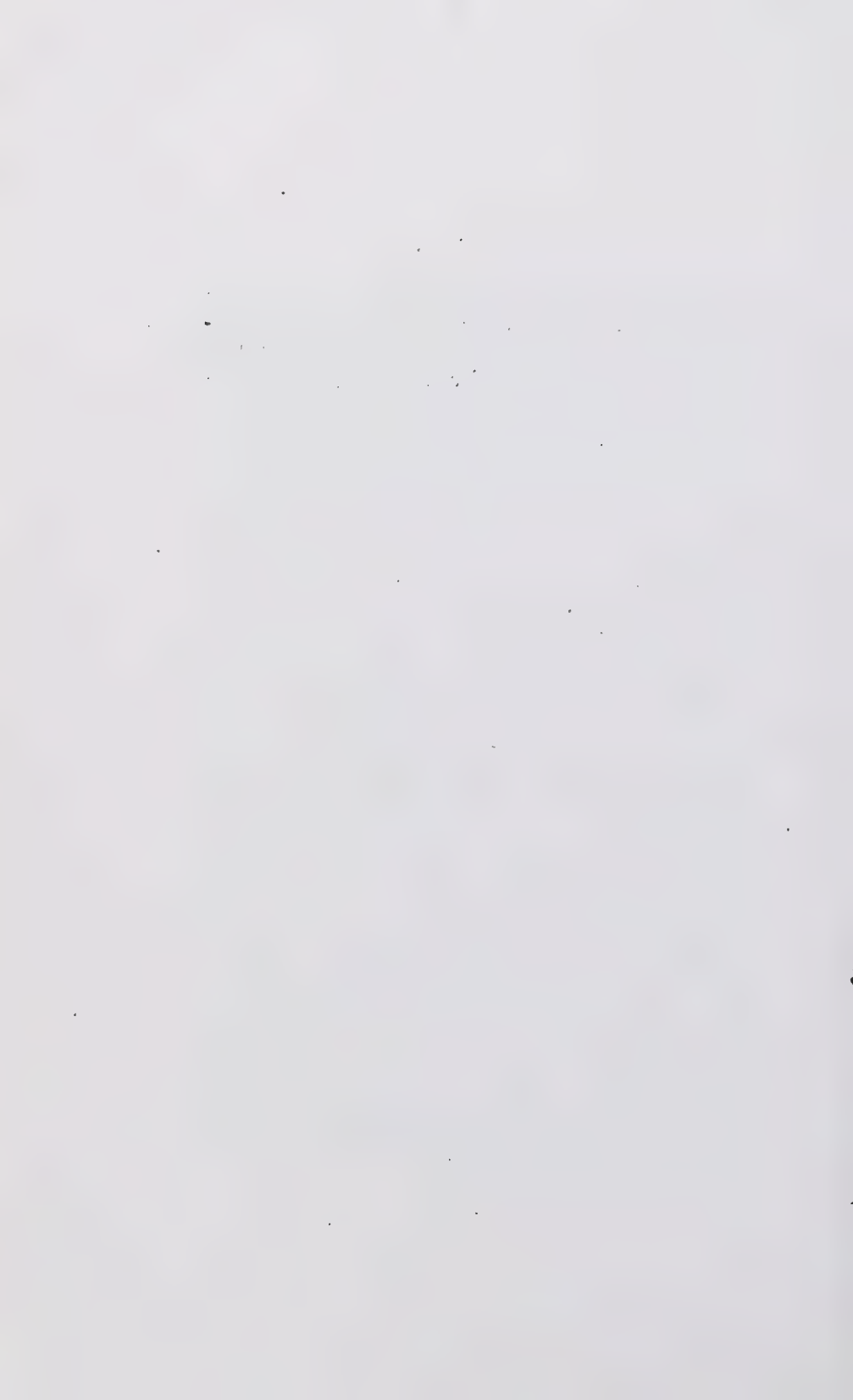
Louise and Stanwise, searching among his papers with a view to righting his disordered affairs, discovered many things—the ravelled threads of much that used to puzzle Louise in her father's antecedents. For Blackoder was wont to tell many untruths. Thus he used to say his father

was a Greek, and changed his name to Blackoder on marrying his mother, a daughter of one of the firm, Helmore, Helmore, and Blackoder. This was untrue: his father, as was said before, had been a Bristol lawyer who had died a convict. Blackoder's father had never changed his name, and had *not* married a Miss Blackoder of the firm of Helmore, Helmore, and Blackoder, but had married a Greek lady of Bristol. The *son* had changed his name, on account of his father's conviction, and had taken the name of the Blackoders, who were distantly related to his father, at a time when death had removed such of them as could have objected. The story of the way his father had been ruined by the hatred of the other members of the firm (to which he had never belonged) was all an invention—as was the account of how Hebditch wished to leave his property to him (Blackoder). He had never been in any way related to Hebditch, except through the slight connection there was between them through his sister marrying Helmore, who was indeed a son of one of the Helmores who had offended Hebditch. The Blackoders to whom Crayston's father was slightly related (and whose name he subsequently took without leave) were never in any way related to old Hebditch, and there could have been no reason entitling them to his "Legacy" as Crayston pretended. Louise and Stanwise likewise naturally came upon the double Will or Codicil (for it was strictly speaking *either* or *neither*, though valid in law) which enabled them to reinstate Helmore in his property.

Louise and Stanwise then married, and they with Stephen and Agnes Helmore lived for many years after in close friendship, and enjoyed such happiness as can fall to the lot

of mortals. Yet over Mrs. Stanwise's happiness there was a shade; for the lawyer Blackoder never was discharged from the mad-house—and how could she forget the strong love—the warped and grasping affection—he had borne her?

END OF HEBDITCH'S LEGACY.



THE BLACK SWAN.



THE BLACK SWAN.

CHAPTER I.

It was eight weeks since a vessel, a large merchant brig bound for London, had left her moorings at Port ———, in the flourishing settlement of Tasmania; and now, lost in the deep windless night, she floated without sound or stir. The cabin lights were extinguished, and all on board the becalmed vessel seemed enveloped in silence and sleep. Her brown wind-worn sails were all furled in the breathless air; there was no sign or signal of any watch kept over the decks. The torpid ship seemed left entirely to her own control; even the steersman was slumbering, his hand attached by a string to the wheel, in case of any unexpected movement in the rudder, or sudden rising of the wind. The breeze which had borne the big ship out so far into the ocean had long before nightfall entirely died away from the face of the water, though high overhead, strange to say, it still lasted, so that the few stars seen from the ship, lost in the darkness below, appeared as though slowly drifting past the apertures in the sultry, overhanging, yet unseen clouds. The sea still heaved slightly round the great black hull, agglomerated into the obscurity surrounding it, save where a

faint line of light was emitted by the water rippling and splashing round its sides.

At times some unlooked-for lurching of the vessel would cause a wave to dash up over the water-line; showering back inflamed into a livid cauldron of glowing phosphoric fire, spreading round in circles of luminous foam, reflected brilliantly in the wet hull, and gleaming in the cabin-windows and on the heavy anchors at the prow; and even, in the utter darkness, playing with a weird flickering reflection on the under sides of the great projecting yards, and the cross-masts and rigging otherwise indiscernible up aloft.

Indeed the sultry tropical water seemed in an unusually excitable phosphoric condition. Every few minutes the water to a distance round the entire hull would be suffused with a pale quivering flame which at times lit up its clear green depths beneath the surface. The spot where floated a piece of drift-timber, dropped overboard during the calm, was shown in the darkness by constantly recurring flashes of light; but where the calm hardly-perceptible swell of the subsiding waves met with no obstruction, they were enveloped in the deepest obscurity.

The whole of the upper outlines of the Black Swan (for so the vessel was named) to a practised eye may have formed a kind of dark *silhouette*, half blotted out against the night, but for two lanterns burning above the bulwarks. One was a red signal-lamp, pendent over the high old-fashioned forecastle, struggling feebly with the intense gloom in which it was hung (too high to shed its faint glimmer on the foredeck); the other, more brilliant in light (fastened to the mainmast), threw a glow all over the stern end of the ship (the deck behind being in the densest shadow), and

fell on the figure of a man, the only human being visible in the darkness. He was walking to and fro in the sombre flickering lamplight, and appeared to be one of the passengers. At intervals he came so close to the steering-wheel that his great black restless shadow, cast by the lamp, covered it, yet without hiding its form, for a dim light burned in the tilted binnacle and reflected a glow on to the brass-bound circle of spokes.

The helmsman from here was just visible in a kind of transparent half-light, still slumbering heavily, and wrapped up in a tarpaulin to keep off the damp night-dew which covered the decks, gleaming in the light, and filling the air with imperceptible mist. At times, the water could be heard faintly babbling round the stern and rudder; but everything else around and on the ship was silent as death—save the ceaseless movement of this man, who continued his monotonous footsteps up and down the deck, his head sunk on his breast, and without appearing to notice anything around him, till his action seemed as restless as an excited, restrained, animal's.

Every now and then he interrupted himself, seeming to listen with impatience, and then resumed his walk. He must have been pacing there a long while, with some object in view, for the dew-drops gleamed like silver on his shoulders and tangled curly hair.

It might have been thought at first that his strange sleepless restlessness was the result of the indescribable *ennui* and weariness of a long voyage, but there would on closer consideration have seemed to be a more poignant cause for it.

A slight noise suddenly attracted his attention, and with

a deep prolonged respiration he turned facing the lamp, and looking intently into the darkness behind it.

His sunburnt bearded face (the eyes glittering as he stood with the light concentrated on them, two scintillating points, like stars surrounded by the deep gloom of the night) looked strangely careworn and fevered, like that of a man who has passed long nights without sleep: it seemed, in its anxious, almost haggard look—coinciding with his restless movements—to express some heavy disappointment or burthen under which his mind was labouring. As he paused with raised head, shading his eyes with his hand, a faint sound, like the rustle of a woman's dress becoming audible above the dreary endless splashing of the water, fell on his ear.

There seemed, at this, a gleam of light reflected suddenly through the gloom of his mind; the despondent expression of his face was utterly changed, and though he could have seen nothing, he turned hastily in the direction of the sound, and disappeared in the darkness.

Almost before he could find where he was going, he nearly stumbled against some figure, a woman standing motionless on the deck near the bulwark. She had come silently in the night out of the companion-stairs which led to the cabin, advancing stealthily without noise, and hardly breathing, as if, while hidden herself, she wished to watch the restless figure pacing in and out of the circle of light.

It was not so intensely dark when *in* the gloom, as it had looked to his eyes, dazzled and blinded by the lamp-light, for against the faint glow of the lantern on the forecastle he could dimly trace the outline of a woman's form.

She remained perfectly motionless and speechless. But without an instant's reflection, his limbs seeming to act before his mind could direct them, or recover consciousness in the sudden bewilderment of his senses, he went up to her impetuously, uttering the name "Laura!" and flinging his arms round her neck and shoulders enveloped in the hood of her shawl, he pressed her passionately to his breast, whispering in a low almost trembling voice,

"I knew you'd be certain to come, my love, though I've waited a weary while for you. Why don't you speak to me, Laura? We shan't be overheard here."

Then as he seemed to kiss her face, a sudden tremor stopped his words, and the woman broke away from his embrace with an angry exclamation, while he, starting back from her, appeared to stagger for an instant as if a snake had stung him.

All this passed in a moment, hidden in the darkness, and the woman whom he had embraced so passionately began crying out in an exasperated voice,

"So I've found you out at last, Denver! How dare you treat me in this fashion? I'm *not* Laura, I'm your own lawful wife; unwelcome enough, I'll be bound! Ah! you sneak back soon enough now, but you shan't escape me! We two are alone at last. You shall give me an account of your conduct and the way you keep the oaths you swore to at God's altar."

"Damn you, will you never let me have one moment to myself, without poisoning it with your presence? It's bad enough to have to *think* about you," the man answered fiercely.

"You're a liar!" she interrupted in a passionate screaming voice. "I've neither been near you nor spoken to you for six weeks. Good God, what gratitude! I've toiled my life out for you, to sit silent by myself in this dreary stifling ship, neglected by every one, watching you make love to another woman, before my very face, hour after hour, day after day, week after week, till it's driven me mad. I've sat thinking about you and watching you till my brain whirled and my eyes grew dizzy, and I could have struck a knife into your hearts! Yet you think because I've taken no notice of you and never spoken to you, that I'm too poor-spirited, or dejected, or callous, to care how you treat me, and that you can do as you like: but you shall find out the difference! You shall know what it is to neglect and scorn a woman's love, and then fall under her power! Every hour of your existences shall be a curse to you and your shameless paramour. *She* shall feel, even if I can't make *you*; and learn what it is to come between a wife and her husband. You've never guessed all that I'm minded to do; but you dread me, and you know that you've reason. You've embittered my entire life from when first I set eyes on you, but I'll be well revenged! I loved you once, Denver, for all you could do to disgust me, as only a woman *can* love, till I found what you'd taken me for, and then I hated you: but sooner than give you up to *her*, I'll strangle you in your sleep! Oh God! after all I've done and suffered for you, to be kissed and embraced in this way for another woman! I could have borne all before; but you've neglected me all my life, and spurned and insulted me now, till you've driven me to distraction. I don't know what I'm doing or saying! It's made me insane to compare

the difference between her sickening face and mine, in the glass below, and think what it's cost me. She affects to ignore my existence, but she shrinks from me and dreads me more and more. I wouldn't change my position for hers. Are my feelings to be no more regarded than a dog's, do you think? I've endured hours upon hours of misery, till my mind wandered, and I hardly knew where I was: only to come to myself remembering that you were both within two or three yards of me, hardly out of my sight or hearing; and, thinking of the wrong you've done me, I've had to dig my nails into my breast, to prevent myself from screaming out, or flying at her and tearing her eyes out and blinding her! Yet I've managed to keep all my resentment to myself, smouldering secretly in my own brain, till the expression of my face makes everybody in the ship shun *me* and pity *you* for having such a wife. Good God! All this has been going on in this cursed ship, minute after minute falling on my brain like drops of water, torturing me till it's driven me to madness! I overheard you asking her to come up here and meet you to-night. I thought to come up and catch you both together, but she wasn't here; and I'd have waited for another opportunity, only you interrupted me with your cursed kiss and drove me out of my senses. What have I done to deserve such treatment? You shall learn what a woman's love turned to hatred is!"

She screamed so at last that her throat seemed quite exhausted with passion, and she broke down into a violent fit of hysterical sobbing. Nothing is more trying to the patience than the convulsive unnatural cries of an hysterical woman; but now in this strange position on the deck

of the ship, hidden as she was in the gloom of the profound night, her voice exasperated by passion seemed something to shudder at.

Denver had kept perfectly speechless and motionless till her voice broke down : one might not have known of his existence : but now he moved away from her into the circle of light. She seemed by an effort to stifle her cries, and followed him screaming still more passionately than before.

"I've had a fit of this coming on for a long while. I've bitten my lips till my mouth was full of blood, to restrain it and wait till my time came, but I'll have it out now ! I thought I'd fling myself overboard into the sea at first, but that I thought how happy it would make you. No I'll not do that ; you can't and shan't get rid of me ! I'm your lawful wife, you've linked your life to mine. You swore at God's altar to share all my sorrows, and I swear you shall to the last bitter dregs ! I'll cling to you to the last hour of your existence, and make every day of your life as great a curse to you as mine are to me ! Ah ! you feel my words, but I'll make you wince still further yet, till you're as mad and wretched as you've made me, though you have some one to love you."

Her voice stopped once more as if she were breathless, though his continued silence seemed only to embitter her anger.

Now that they were both come fully into the lamp-light, the display of mad passion in the woman's face was something terrible ; lit up by the feeble flickering lamp it formed a white angry spot of light surrounded by an immense expanse of darkness. The sky, the sea, and the atmosphere, and the great ship itself, save for a few drifting

stars overhead, were here blotted out together and absorbed into the night, and the intense monotonous silence broken by her exasperated voice seemed wishing to diffuse and drown the sound in its breathless immensity.

It was as the self-centred madness of Humanity contending vainly with the solemn undeviating dignity of Nature, for no soul on board the ship appeared to hear her.

There was a fierce constrained look about Denver's eyes, but he still said not a word: *her* face looked perfectly hideous in her mad temper. The hood of her cloak had slipped back on her shoulders, leaving her unbound black hair to fall in wreathing tangles about her face and neck. She had thrown the shawl over her night-gown, and her feet and throat were bare. Her face was very dark in complexion, and her livid lips quivering back over her teeth showed them glistening at times. Her deep-set eyes glittering with the revengeful reckless light of madness, under her high cheek-bones and dark eyebrows, gave to her naturally plain features a devilish expression, such as only the blind mad vindictive jealousy which was goading her could give to the divinely intended face of woman—hers looked more like the head of an enraged venomous snake.

Most men would have been cowed and silenced by such temper; this man, in the life of danger and toiling stamped upon his features, had gone through too much to be a coward. But the sudden and extreme transition from the sweet expression, the answering embrace, the warm beauty and soft utterance, of the girl who loved him, to this woman his wife, whom he detested—(hated, even more violently, from the lingering consciousness that in his

blind desperate love for her rival, he was wronging her undeservedly),—the change, from the almost ecstatic happiness he had felt for one instant, to this hateful reality, utterly deadened and sickened his heart, and unnerved his brain. His head felt giddy, as he thought of the irrevocable hold she had on him; but of all the conflicting passions which beset him at that moment nothing made him hate her more than the consciousness of his broken oaths, and of the great wrong he was doing her, which could drive her to this. He could hardly bear to look at her, yet his mind flooded by his blind reckless passion for her rival was utterly incapable of pity for *her*. For he could only feel the tantalized never-satiated longing of his heart, and see that his wife, indifferent to him before, and whom he now shrank from, attempted to stand in the way of the only happiness which seemed left to him in the world. He could no more struggle against the fate which had led him on board this ship to fall in love with the beautiful girl (who as blindly reciprocated his passion) than a tired spent swimmer in a whirlpool could contend with it.

And could his wife always cling to him all his life as she had threatened? it seemed like some intangible spell laid on him. His brain felt bewildered, as if his reason were going: all his mental struggling only seemed to leave his love more clearly defined and tenacious—his hatred for his wife more bitter and loathing.

What could be expected of him? he was only one man guided by the same instincts which ever sway the minds of all humanity.

One half-uttered irresistible suggestion seemed always

dinning in the nerves of his brain. Once it came so strongly as almost to fashion itself into words, but something like a flash of fire in the darkness seemed to bewilder his eyes. It was *too* terrible—he dared not think about it: he felt powerless as a child, and could do nothing. Yet with his wife living, it seemed to him (in his present excitement) that his whole future life would be one blind blank misery to him.

As he stood with his back to the lamp, his gleaming eyes looking restlessly aside into the deep night, like a tiger glancing through its bars, anywhere but at the hateful face before him, in the silence and utter obscurity where all human associations were lost and obliterated, where his mind could meet with no known object to assure itself of its own identity, he could hardly realise his position.

Yet it was unfailingly true. There she stood endeavouring by all the means in her power to taunt and exasperate him out of all patience, while his whole being, well-nigh transmuted to madness by the ordeal it was passing through, was shuddering at and yet irresistibly fascinated by the desperate idea which still haunted and clung to him.

So it was not so much the fear of her unending exasperated reproaches that enervated his limbs and made his brain swim, as the shuddering realities of his own existence.

There was a cold sweat on his brow, despite the fierce look which flitted at times over his features. Nothing could more strangely exhibit the instantaneous extremes between passion and discouragement to which some men's minds are subjected. He could say nothing and hardly

heard what she was saying. She had ceased for awhile as if to gain breath, and now more angered than ever at his silence, or perhaps thinking she had cowed him (for in her wild exasperated state of mind she was utterly incapable of understanding what his silence meant), she went on tauntingly and bitterly.

"Ah! I'm only a weak woman, yet you durstn't look me in the face, coward that you are! It's no use prevaricating; you shall repent your conduct. You think you've kept yourselves so close, but I'll expose you and your shameless paramour to the whole ship. They shall all know what you've made of her and what a villain you've been to me:" and again she broke down into a violent hysterical sobbing and screaming, repeating over and over again, in sob-broken utterance, "I hate you, I detest you!"

"If you hate me as much as I loathe you," said Denver, at last, forcing himself to look at her, "why do you come up here at this hour of all hours to madden and tempt me in this way?"

He muttered this almost under his breath as if speaking to himself, but her morbidly acute ear caught the meaning of his words. Her eyes flashed fire and she left off sobbing and gave a taunting laugh, coming still nearer to him on the deck till she could have touched him with her hand, looking defiantly straight in his face. A child could have told she was not in her right senses. Denver went on endeavouring to speak calmly, his tight-clutching hands and lips convulsive with fast accumulating anger.

"What right have you to attempt to make my life a misery to me? We were never happy together. Your ex-

istence has been the curse of my life. You only come up here now to taunt and spite me!"

"What have you done to spite *me*?" she screamed with a fresh outburst of tears.

"Yes you *have* found the truth out and I never tried to conceal it. I do love Laura, I loved her from the first time I ever set eyes on her. I never in my wildest dream saw a face like hers in my life before, and I could no more resist loving her than I could help breathing!—while I *hate* you. You've goaded me now till the devil seems twitching my arms to fling you into the sea—and myself after you! Yes, I do love her, and she loves me in return, in spite of you. She was coming up here to meet me just now. I've been waiting here for two hours and was going wild with impatience till I mistook you for her and kissed you—when I'd sooner have kissed a black bush-snake. Your presence is utterly hateful to me; I'm reckless of you; I don't care what you can do or say. God knows I can't help it if I'm wronging *her*. We can't keep away from each other. On shore we might have been separated; but here in this ship, getting more sick of it every day, I can no more help loving her, or keep from going near her, than iron from a lodestone, or an opium-eater from his laudanum. I'm in heaven when I'm near, and with her, all my life, past and to come, seems obliterated: yet I suffer worse torments than hell's when I'm alone again. I've walked about this deck in the night when she was gone below and nobody could see me, growing more hopelessly infatuated about her every minute (and yet something telling me I could never be really happy with her while you remained my wife), strug-

gling to realize why love such as she and I have for each other must be kept secret or suppressed to break our hearts with—unable to discover or do anything to help ourselves, like flies caught in a spider's web!—till I felt as if my brain were entangled in some horrid dream that I should wake from and find a delusion—yet finding it true—till I've gone as wild and desperate as you, and cursed myself, and you, and the God I was taught to believe in, and everything else in the world excepting her. She is as light-hearted, as I'm wretched, as pure and innocent as the sea-foam we're floating on.—Come!" he said, suddenly, and sternly breaking off the desultory disconnected way he had been speaking, and looking straight at her. "Don't begin again. You'd better leave me, Dorothy. I'm wretched enough without you. You may go too far, for it's raised the devil in me talking of *her* in comparison with . . ."

If the light could have been directed on to his countenance, Dorothy his wife would have seen a strange scowl on his brow; but standing with his back to the lamp as he was, she could only see him shudder and press his clenched hands to his forehead.

She had managed to keep silent with great difficulty, though it could be seen plainly that she was getting more madly exasperated every instant. She seemed hardly able to refrain from flinging herself on him; and she clenched her teeth tight till her head and neck shook in a kind of convulsion—she might have fallen down in a fit, but almost before the last threatening word had left his lips, she interrupted him and said, in a low suppressed voice, "*Fling me overboard, you lying coward, and stain your soul with*

murder as well." At the same time she advanced so close to him that her face was within a foot of his, their eyes glaring straight into each other's pupils, hers blind and mad with stored-up resentment at the wrongs she supposed herself to have suffered, reflected in his, which showed luminous and fierce as an animal's.

"Fling me overboard, you lying coward and be hung for it! You needn't look at me in that way, you've raised the devil in *me*, and you may quell him if you can. I'll *not* be silent—you shan't intimidate me, I'll scream louder—I'm not frightened to be overheard. She pure! She innocent! Why should a married man be waiting for her up here at this time of night then?" she screamed almost inarticulate with passion and violence, and struggling to express plainly her meaning. Then she retreated back a step from him; shaking her outstretched arm threateningly in his face, while Denver turned to the light, following her movements.

The whole of the hatred which for one long month had disputed his soul, as one might say, with his infatuated love, seemed gathered into one look as he listened to her.

"I'll expose and punish the shameless creature! I'll expose and punish your shameless victim, though I'm sent to hell-fire the next instant for it!"

There was a sudden pause, a crisis such as any one looking on at this scene might have shuddered under. She seemed quite unappalled at what she had roused in the man, and stood facing him. He moved, and his face was lost in shadow, and she started back and waited panting and breathless. There was a dead silence, broken only by the placid ripple of the waves, when suddenly a noise

like the opening of a shut casement was heard. Previously some undefined sound like the low murmur of a bee had been half-audible; but now some twenty yards from where these two stood, a woman's clear sweet voice rose through the night, in words which could be heard plainly as they issued from her low-strained throat. It was a song the melody of which sounded beautiful beyond expression as the singer sang and pronounced it clearly with her subtle voice—

Alas! who knows or cares, my love,
If our love live or die,—
If thou thy frailty, sweet, should'st prove,
Or my soul thine deny?
Yet merging sorrow in delight,
Love's dream disputes our devils night.

None know, sweet love, nor care a thought
For our heart's vague desire,
Nor if our longing come to nought,
Or burn in aimless fire;
Let them alone, we'll waste no sighs:
Cling closer, love, and close thine eyes!

She ceased and the sweet vibration died swiftly away in the depths of the night. The mind of the singer producing this song must have formed a strange contrast in its utter isolation from the mad flood of passion and hatred and recrimination which swept round those two.

It was as if an utterly windless passionless space of smooth sea and sunlit sky existed, enveloped by a raging black foam-surgings ocean—utterly incommunicable with and undisturbed by the surrounding tempest; for the human mind in its variety is like the waves of the sea,

one driving on and following another: one strong ripple fashioning a million others to its furthest confines.

Strange was the effect this song produced on both of them,—it was as if the wind had died away in the midst of a storm.

The woman stopped, listening to it with a ghastly look and averted eyes, while Denver turned from his wife trembling all over until it died away, pressing his hands the while wildly over his eyes and brows. When it ceased Dorothy's senses were suddenly recalled to his presence: she seemed to start and come to herself with a sudden tremor. Her eyes gleamed wildly and cruelly, but her face seemed changed into colourless stone: the next instant she was lost to sight. He saw her face and form recede like a flicker of light vapour into the darkness, and only heard the rustle of her dress on the boards: then all was quiet. He remained a while as if stupefied, without motion, and then he went and leant against the bulwark, looking vacantly out into the night.

CHAPTER II.

GABRIEL DENVER was one of a party of emigrants to the first attempted colony of Swan River settlement. This was as a youth with his parents. His mother, who was Portuguese, by birth, caught fever, and sickened, and died, from the privations consequent upon that well-known and disastrous expedition, where five hundred people were landed and left all but naked in the autumn mists and rain, without covering or shelter. His father was English.

He had lived in most of the settlements of the then wilderness of Australia, before he finally settled down and married Dorothy his wife, in the island colony of Tasmania. He was a young man of five-and-twenty at that time; impetuous and with but slight knowledge of the refinements of a really civilised life. His wife was about the same age, but had till within two or three years of her marriage been in England.

This marriage may be said to have been one more of necessity than of inclination on his part, for he had been engaged deeply in one of the wild speculation manias in which the busy colonists used then so frequently to lose their hard-earned gains, and he had lost, not only his own, but his sister's money, which by marrying he was enabled to pay back.

As might be supposed, Dorothy must have been strongly inclined towards her husband; still young and handsome, the rough people among whom they lived must have

deemed him far too good for the wife he found in her after two or three months. But Denver was of a taciturn, almost one might say sombre nature: there was a sprinkling of the old Spanish gravity in his blood maybe, but at any rate he seemed to have accepted his fate passively, though the lines of his face showed the deep and resolute inborn energy of which he was capable when roused or provoked.

In his character the fire and passionate fitfulness of his mother's southern nature were strangely blended with the cold reflecting qualities and energy of the northern blood: one in no way neutralizing the other, for with Denver reflection always came *after* the attainment of his desire, never before.

It was an impossibility to a man of this temperament to love a woman of whose heart and soul he knew, or could tell, nothing, and in whose face was no beauty; and if his wife really loved him or was so inclined at first, she never let him know it, but soon grew callous to the neglect which in the beginning had roused her bitter though unavailing anger. She relapsed into a mere household drudge, while Denver half forgot her existence in the labour of daily toiling and in the sweat of his brow.

Sometimes while away in the bush, surrounded by the wild and awe-striking Australian scenery, he might perhaps have reflected half-bitterly on the disappointed and unrealized dreams of his youth, and on the contrast presented to them by his wife, who would never even so much as inquire, after a three weeks' absence, where he had been. He was a man who, had he been endowed with education and with the power of expressing his thoughts (which as it

was he scarcely knew himself to be), might have been a thinker or a poet, but who, as things were, kept solitarily within the circle of his own thoughts. Hidden passion however, in one form or another, will always sooner or later find a means of expression.

I think a sadness was cast across his mind by the death of his last blood relation in the colony—his sister Winifred—for whose sake he had united himself to Dorothy. She died unmarried, so the money came back to him. While his sister was living, he could not really regret his marriage, seeing that it was for her advantage, but now, when owing to her death, the money came back to him, it mentally broke the sole tie that united him to his wife, however much they might remain united in the sight of the law. Still his life was settled: he had chosen his lot rashly, but he must abide by it. Maybe the patience with which he bore his self-imposed chains was caused by the absence of any inducement to burst them, for he was a man of deep and hidden passion, and of that keen nervous temperament, of which the hot outbursts would have been irresistible, when urging him on to some definite object.

Now for Denver to learn that a thing was banned to him, was enough almost to make him unconsciously long for it, and being truthful as a child it was impossible for him to conceal his wants. This disposition was of that order often to be found in the half-civilized men who begin life in strange and new colonies, and is as it were a sort of protest of nature, or half return to the blind, though in the main, unerringly-right, instincts, from which civilization has originally evolved them.

His nature too was of that peculiar magnetic order which

so unaccountably assimilates, as one might say, other minds to itself. This quality of mind is more powerful even than beauty of face ; Denver possessed both, and his being so perfectly unaware of their presence made them even stronger. He was indeed a man with whom excitable women fall, sometimes, madly in love.

Now Dorothy callous as she was, on finding that *she* could never be loved by him, determined still that no other woman should ; her husband never suspected the deep and patient jealousy she really regarded him with, though a practised physiognomist might have read it clearly enough from her face and deep-set eyes.

Now they had lived together quietly, though without children, for nine years, when on the morning of December 15th, 1824, a letter arrived for Denver dated a full year previously. It had taken all that time to reach him, and was from a London lawyer, informing him of a legacy left him, by which he became possessor of a larger sum than he could have made during his whole life in the island. There was no choice for him but either to hear nothing more for a year or even longer, or to leave immediately for England by the Black Swan return emigrant ship, which would start from S—— in a couple of days. Denver, who had already been thinking more than once of taking the journey for other reasons, left hastily to secure a passage for himself and wife, she remaining behind to arrange such things as might be necessary for the long voyage.

After a four hours' ride across the rough roads, Denver reached the small seaport town, two hours before the arrival of the ship from Hobart Bay ; and he first saw it as a small speck on the horizon gradually enlarging, till it

came within half a mile of the shore. Two women could be seen on the quarter-deck, but they did not attract his notice, for he supposed there would be many other passengers on board.

It was nearly night-time before the Black Swan anchored in the shallow waters of the bay, and only the dark silhouettes of her flapping and soon furled sails could be seen against the dying radiance in the western sky, as he was rowed to her side. As may be supposed, such an unusual arrival as an English ship in the undulating waters of the little bay created much excitement in the town, and the shore was thronged with men, women, and children, and noise and light. Denver soon got on board in the darkness to make arrangements with the master, and found the first mate on deck.

The ship sailed the next evening he was told, there would be only two passengers on board beside himself and wife. Had he any family with him?

"None."

Well he hoped they should make a good voyage. Captain Gregory had been out shooting at the Cape and had met with an accident he was sorry to say. They were to pick him up on returning if possible, but it was by no means certain that he would be well enough, so that the speaker himself had had to navigate the ship, and a heavy responsibility it was added to his other duties. They had only touched land to procure fresh vegetables, and it was not an unpleasant surprise to get two more passengers. Who were the two on board? Well, one was a pretty girl with bright brown hair; her name was Laura Conway. The other was her servant, or nurse or something, he didn't know. They

both kept very close to themselves, so he hadn't seen much of them during the five days they'd been on board. He'd heard on shore that she'd lost her parents and was to join some relative in London. At any rate she looked very poorly and he— Oh, the fare! the passage money? Well, it's ninety guineas down in gold per man, no extras and twenty more when you leave the ship— Well, as he was saying, Miss Conway looked poorly and he hoped Mrs. Denver would look after her and freshen her up a bit, she'd want it before long; her old nurse was worse than an encumbrance to her.

This disconnected dialogue took place on the fore-deck, in the dark, so that Denver could barely see the face of the man he was talking to. The idea of being in company with the girl the sailor described to him interested his mind, despite the more important matters he had on hand, and perhaps his compassion was in some slight degree roused by the trifling unconsidered words of the sailor, but at present he had brought his money to pay for the passage, and the mate led him up the obscure lumbered deck and down in to the cabin to sign the printed receipt.

An old woman with a worn wrinkled face sat with her elbows on the table as they entered, and she was coughing. The sailor said, "Mr. Gabriel Denver, your fellow-passenger to be, with his wife." She rose tottering, and looked at him, making a curtsy, and then went away. The man signed the form, not without some consideration, counted the gold which the colonist put down on the table, tested doubtful pieces in his mouth; then finding it all right he put the paper into Denver's hand, asking him at the same moment whether he

wished to look into his sleeping-berth; and he went and opened a door at the end of the compartment, disclosing a passage about two feet wide and ten long, which had doors on each side, some open and some shut. Denver was too tired to take much notice of what he saw. He only spoke of the place being filled with the peculiar salt smell to be found in all confined places in the vicinity of the sea: but the mate, with the cheerful remark, "The stench 'll soon clear off when it's used a little, and we get out on to the open water," walked through and flung back a small window at the end, letting a fresh stream of the sea-breeze flow through in their faces, while Denver prepared to go on shore worn out with the excitement of the day.

When he rose the next morning he had different businesses to transact in the town, which kept him occupied till nearly noon; then he was free to go down to the shore and on board the ship again. There was a slight swell on from the sea, and the brown sand was all wet and dashed with its foam, as he walked down the small picturesque jetty, made of stones and whole tree-trunks bound together with cramps of iron, and covered with green seaweed below high water mark, and stepped into one of the boats moored there. It was dinner hour and there were only two or three listless tamed aborigines to be seen lying idly, out of reach of the sea, like dogs half buried in the hot sand in the sunshine; and he had to row himself.

The Black Swan swaying slightly on the waves lay anchored about two hundred yards off shore. She was a large and two-masted ship, Spanish-built about forty years before, and had been most likely captured in one of the numerous sea skirmishes of 1780. Her forecastle was

very high and its beak projected prominently over the waves elongated still further by the bowsprit. The prow was very blunt and this showed a dull sailer. The quarter-deck and stern under which Denver first approached, rose about six feet over the middle-deck, but were lower than the forecastle, and four windows cut lozenge-shaped in the sides with little panes of thick glass intended to light the cabin, and resist the sea at the same time, gave the stern of the ship a singularly picturesque appearance. A line of fantastic carving went round these apertures continued from one to another in a line round the stern where the name of the ship was painted in red. This carving was gilded but tarnished and worn by age; the rest of the side was painted simply black as the name seemed to suggest.

Early in the morning she had finished loading what little cargo remained to be taken on board, and now only rode at anchor. The great ship as she swung and lurched tossing her high masts on the slight fluctuations of the waves seemed like a restive horse impatient for action.

There appeared to be no one on deck, the men were most likely resting from their labours at noon. Making his boat fast to a sort of ladder which hung down the side at the gangway, Denver scrambled up on to the deck and looking round him he saw the still uncovered entrance to the hold, a great black chasm, with an iron ladder leading down it which he began descending as if in the hope of finding some one there. Right at the farthest end, a ship-lantern, swinging from the great cross-beam which held the deck up, threw a dim and uncertain light over great heaps of sacks and barrels, secured and lashed together by connecting ropes, while a great blaze of sunshine from the

opening above showed him the place was deserted. The smell was so sickening that he was glad to climb out into the fresh sea breeze again.

It was now approaching the height of the Austral summer ; the day would have been unendurably sultry but for the cool and fragrant gusts of the wind fresh-scented from the just-blossoming woods off shore. Denver went listlessly and sat down in a patch of blue shadow cast over the stern, as if to wait at his leisure the appearance of any one connected with the ship. He first looked out to sea, perhaps thinking upon the miles upon miles of hidden peril which lay beyond those now smiling horizons. Then after a while he turned his gaze across the cool green glittering waves, heaving and undulating one after another as they stretched away for the shore. There lay the town built chiefly of wood, its white-painted walls bright in the sun, here and there an English red-tiled roof visible and forming a contrast to the rest of the straggling-built houses, of which the planks, painted gaudily bright when first hammered together, were now toned down and neutralized into strangely beautiful harmony by the dust and dirt of a few seasons. The sunbright curtains dangled at the open windows, the dusty grey-green foliage of the Tasmanian trees (diversified in one place by a group of yellow-flowered laburnums imported by some home-sick colonist) moved tremulously in the wind, all forming a picture unlike anything one can imagine in Europe ; a kind of intermingling of tropical and English scenery strange to contemplate ; not indeed that the Australian could be supposed to notice such peculiarities as he gazed on the view before him, or the yet more peculiarly tropical way in which the trees towered

over and grew amongst the houses, sprung from the gardens and waste places. Since the few short years of the town's existence all had risen as if by magic, from the very same spot he had landed on twelve years before, then a beautiful wilderness; now over the whole place there hung a vapour of blue smoke from the chimneys.

Even the water seemed peculiar to itself in its almost faultless lucidity: the sand in its depths sparkled like gold, and the shadow of the ship cast slantingly through the waves could be seen plainly on it.

The long reaches of the bay or cove were seen winding for miles on each side of the town which lay in its centre, edged always by a continuous line of white-foaming breakers. Denver's keen eyes could see the bright-coloured flowers as they grew scattered on the low furze-covered cliffs, on which, two or three miles off, the dark inland forest grew in places so low down near the sea that it seemed to reach over and cast shadows on the surge; the well-known densely-wooded hills, slightly cultivated at their bases, rose behind. All was crowned by the deep-coloured, sultry, and glorious blue sky, and the whole scene was burning and scintillating beneath the unmitigated splendour of the noon-day sun.

To most of the people who live, or may have lived in this world, any particular scenery recalling impressions of past happiness to the mind, may be said to have satiated it, so as to dull and deaden any feeling of regret on its being exchanged or lost to view. Now this prospect which Denver gazed into so intently, if it recalled no positive misery to him, at least suggested few ideas of any but the most transient pleasure, and this might account for the half-sad

feeling which tinged and invaded his mind as he thought that he might never see it again in this life. Somehow he felt that he had not had all he ought to have had out of so much bounteous profusion ; some intangible and unnamable desire in his heart was left unsatisfied, an unpaid debt of nature existed as it were, which he was reluctant to cancel.

As he sat thus, gazing dreamily into the distance, the intense noon-day silence was suddenly broken. A woman's voice was heard singing down underneath him, the sound so faint and inarticulate at first that it seemed half formed out of the plashing of the water, and more like the wild unconscious sighing of the wind in an *Æolian* harp than a human voice, but its sweetness soon intensified into a thrill that held all his nerves in suspense for the moment while it lasted ; then it died away.

Denver's brain, dreaming over the associations suggested by the spectacle of the country across the sea, was just in that unconcentrated state which leaves the mind helplessly unprotected from outer impulses or impressions ; in fact liable to be overwhelmed by the first pleasurable sensation which stirs its curiosity ; and this unexpectedly sweet voice more than startled him, for no doubt he dimly remembered something of what the mate had told him the evening before. He stood up, as if waiting for it to recommence, but only the plaintive, half-hushed, ripple of the water could be heard, until he could have believed he had imagined it into some tune himself. He at last walked across the deck and got down into his boat alongside, determined to row round the ship and find where the sound came from ; and he had just pulled round the stern, tossing gently on the waves, as

he was arrested by something which apparently fascinated him.

A young girl, nearly grown to womanhood, was leaning with her bare arms on the sill of a cabin casement, looking across the cool green sea, to where it deepened into blue at its confines. She had a face sad in expression, yet so beautiful, that Denver could hardly believe in what he saw. Her eyes were all luminous and pale with reflected lights from the translucent water, and the warm fragrant wind was blowing her golden brown hair in clustering ringlets across her shoulders and neck, and where the sunlight caught on it, its tangles glowed and sparkled as with red fire. She was combing out its vine-like tendrils, and singing still, though almost under her breath. A linen chemisette hung lightly round the soft curve of her white delicate shoulders and was pressed and modelled to the shape of her breast by the sea breeze. Her throat, where it showed through her streaming hair, was exquisitely tender and well formed.

The oars dropped out of Denver's hands as he looked up at her, and this slight noise attracted her attention. She turned, and seeing the strange bearded face with its keen glistening eyes, watching her, she disappeared but not before a deep blush had suffused her countenance: and he was left staring up at the empty casement like a bird fascinated by a snake, his heart beginning to throb, and his nerves to thrill as if under the influence of some wild burst of music, as indeed at first he had been. Such subtle magic seemed instilled into his brain, that he still remained as if stupefied with his face turned up to the blank window, which, with its gilded carving, looked like a frame from

which some wonderful picture had been withdrawn, until an old wrinkled face appeared at the opening and a curtain was drawn across it. This recalled him to himself, and with his brain in a whirl, he again began, but slowly and reluctantly, to pull round the ship.

Denver could not have seen this girl, Laura Conway (for such was her name) above two or three quarters of a minute at the utmost, and yet had she mesmerized him, he could not have separated himself more unwillingly from her (or rather from the spot where he had seen her) or have fallen more completely under her power, had she wished for power over him. Now that he could see her no longer he seemed to have emerged from some dream the entire meaning, or words, or appearances of which the awakened sleeper tries and longs ineffectually to reconstruct, from such fleeting fragments as remain in his memory.

It was past; and only the red curtain fluttered in the wind.

They say that dreams occur simultaneously with the act of awakening,—this also had been all but instantaneous, and after it, a sort of awakening seemed to have been entailed, though to what, he knew not. Then perhaps, in that first instant, had his soul caught a glimpse down that long vista of entanglement so soon to mislead it. For Laura's beautiful eyes had ensnared his soul with their magnetism though he could hardly remember their colour; still less recall distinctly the shape of her face. An indistinct impression of sun-sparkling wind-blown hair, of her bare arms and white shoulders, was all that was left for his imagination to fill up and complete: or perhaps *assimilate* to some forgotten ideal of its own, and this may account better for

his ultimate feelings towards her, than if he had known her from childhood.

Now there is always in the human heart, no matter how bad, or dull, or callous, it may be in other directions, a certain store of conjugal love which can never be wasted by any but legitimate use, however long it may lie unused. Denver had never loved any woman save his dead sister, and now for the first time in his life he had met with a woman he could be satisfied to love as his wife.

Not indeed that the drift of this unspeculative inclination and love was voluntary—for the present he was utterly incapable of analysing or understanding his feelings. He only felt the instinctive yearning, the charm which leads or misleads the brain and heart, and was as incapable of guiding it, or calming himself, as of staying the sun's course in the distant blue heaven above him. The love that ultimately changed his whole nature and being, wound and instilled itself into him before he knew of its existence, and was as it were carried through his brain and nerves with the unconscious circulation of his life-blood, or like wild-fire through the sun-burnt arid wildernesses he had passed his life in and well-nigh identified his nature with, fire which it takes but a lucifer match to ignite; but which must then burn all before it to the sterile end.

When he did ultimately become aware of what his love must entail in its fulfilment (far out at sea as they then were with nothing else to occupy his attention) he was too much carried away by the passionate wilfulness of his nature to be able to resist his inclination, or even to dream of doing so. But now when scarce six minutes had passed, he loved blindly and helplessly like a child which cries for some-

thing it is unable to ask for in words—though his heart's demand was soon to grow articulate. Foreshadowings of all these phases of passion glided past his mind in a sort of reverie, while the boat rolled and quivered in the shifting waves, impelled reluctantly towards the shore, for he would fain have gone back again, could he have found any plausible reason for his doing so. He faced the Black Swan as he sat in the boat, and in his eyes the great ship, so matter-of-fact in its picturesque plainness ten minutes before, was transformed into a magic place, each casement, timber or rope of it haunted with strange ineffable fantasies, and all concentrating round one point, the face he had fallen in love with. At last he reached the jetty and stepped out among several men who stood there, scarcely noticing their faces, and stood looking back on the ship as it rode at anchor.

Two or three figures appeared about it, some aloft, and some on deck, and a boat half-filled with cabbages and carrots put off, to go on board, as he stood there, for the ship was taking in such vegetables and greenmeat as would last some time during the voyage; the boat reached it, its cargo was hauled up in a net and it returned empty. Two or three rough carts loaded with potatoes stood on the sand, and the men were all too busy unloading them to notice Denver's abstracted gaze fixed on the stern of the vessel.

A few of the cunning-brained natives stood around, in order to steal wherever they might get a chance in the confusion; one had brought the dead strange-shaped body of a kangaroo to sell to the ship. Boats were employed carrying the vegetables, and the whole crew were engaged

getting them on board. Great strings of cabbages were hung round the stern, and strange to say, even in the rigging; after a while the kangaroo itself was hung up under the shrouds, head downwards; the ship's own boat was hoisted up and secured on the deck. At last the present master of the Black Swan, the man he had seen the night before, came off on shore and stood talking to Denver for more than half an hour, and giving directions to the men.

It was a remarkable and suggestive thing that Denver never spoke one word of the girl he had seen and knew to be on board. The sailor was inquiring of him when his wife would arrive and what luggage they would have, and he merely replied to the questions; and when the mate returning asked him if he cared to go back with him and dine (for the officers dined an hour later than the men), he made some excuse and refused: it seemed the man was not aware of his having already been on board that day.

He was left to himself again, and he spent the whole afternoon wandering about the little wooden-paved streets of the town, always coming back to examine the ship afresh with unrelaxing vigilance. Now about four o'clock as he came down in front of the vessel for perhaps the eighth or ninth time, he saw a woman standing on the quarter-deck, just where he himself had been that morning; she was leaning on the bulwarks looking at the shore. Denver always had in his coat pocket a small telescope or eye-glass such as was used in those days in the colonies for finding cattle that had strayed; he raised this and looked through it. As if by magic her face came within two or three

feet of his eager eyes, making him at first almost start back.

No philosopher, whose seemingly wasted years of labour and unremittent watchfulness have unexpectedly rewarded him with the sight of a new planet, could have gazed on it with more rapture than that which shook Denver's soul, as he looked for the first time unhindered on Laura's face. When once the star is found there is an end of it, who can know or examine it further? but Denver knew he would soon be side by side with Laura, in her presence, hearing the rustle of her dress, almost within sound of her respiration and hearing her speak, and would live near her day by day, a space of time that seemed to him in his blindness a whole eternity.

No words can describe the unutterable longing which fell on his heart as he watched the tender figure (she was clothed in blue serge) balancing gracefully and slenderly with the slight motion of the sea, her face like an unplucked flower, with beautiful curved mouth and drooping eyelids, weighed down by the lashes over large dilated pupils, the irises as blue as heaven, while her hair was now clustered and bound round her forehead; all seeming so near to him that he could have stretched out his hand to touch it, and yet so far off. His lips trembled and in his agitation he moved the telescope, and before he could fix it again she was gone.

This scene was the last stroke in the forging of his passion, from that moment he knew that he loved her irrevocably.

One may perhaps think that this description of the hot outburst of passion in the heart of a grown man all in so

short a time is exaggerated, or too imaginary to be true; but one must always remember that every feeling that goes to the making of an ordinary attachment must, to him who loves at first sight, be it as it were condensed into one simultaneous draught: no wonder then that it should intoxicate the mind and senses speedily. There are phases of human passion which, while they last, can never be described in words—only some of our most madly inspired musicians have been divinely gifted with the power to elicit and strike these chords, for which indeed their art is the only possible utterance.

All the rest of the day as Denver paced about looking on the ship, a divine ecstasy of yearning seemed to have fallen on him such as might have possessed the soul of some ancient martyr as it swept through the darkness of death into the open radiance of its imaginary heaven.

It is strange that all that time he should have shrunk from going on board the ship where she was—until the last moment. I think it was a kind of anticipation of delight, a prolongation of longing to its uttermost limits of desire, which kept him on shore till his wife arrived in the town. Very little of his thoughts had been spent on *her* that day.

The sun was setting in a swift-fading flood of luminosity over the hills, and as the shades of evening fell, veiling the town and the sea in its placid obscurity, they went on board. Before morn the signal-lamps of the Black Swan had passed into the gloom over the horizon.

CHAPTER III.

Now in a short time, of the four passengers whom the Black Swan carried with her, Denver and his wife Dorothy, Laura Conway and her old nurse, one no longer needed her shelter; for the old decrepit woman sickened and died in the first week of the long and perilous voyage, and the poor girl her mistress was left without a single known friend within many thousand miles of her. When the dead woman was cast overboard by the sailors, Laura as she looked into the fast-receding distance blurred by her tears (where the shotted hammock had been flung into its ocean grave) found and knew that she was alone in the world. The dead woman must have been connected with her earliest associations—the dim consecrated recollections of childhood—and her death was an unexpected loss such as leaves a void indeed in daily life: yet what grief she felt, she seemed to restrain within herself. She must have endured sorrow before, for she was silent over it: but a weariness like enervation seemed to have cast its visible shadow over her, and she remained by herself in her own compartment, or went about the confined space in the stern, with pallid face and listless footsteps.

Only by some strong effort of the will could Denver restrain his commiseration from too plainly expressing what was in his heart, and perhaps his first feelings of

real hatred for Dorothy arose from the cold unsympathetic manner in which she first looked on at the death-bed and strange funeral :—and then neglected Laura afterwards.

Something must have betrayed him to his wife : she knew that he loved Laura, before Laura knew it herself. She never spoke to him, and seldom even noticed Laura's presence, and said no word to her about the old nurse's death. Perhaps she noticed the flush which came over the pallid features, and the eyes which brightened, whenever the colonist was near, or speaking to Laura, and this seemed perpetually recurring, yet, strange to say, she appeared to avoid them, and even purposely leave them together : yet in reality she ever stealthily watched them.

It was her pride endeavouring to overcome or hide her jealousy, but it was an unequal strife, for under the veil of affected carelessness, the gnawing care was always in her heart.

One night, in the double cabin in which they slept, lying awake in the darkness, she heard Denver muttering in his slumber like a sleep-talker, and listening intently she heard him, after a while, utter distinctly the words,

“Laura, Laura, I love you.”

The next morning she insisted on changing her cabin and having one to herself—another was prepared for her, and in this she seemed to pass all her time.

The chief cabin of the Black Swan was a low-roofed compartment about twenty or thirty feet long and of the width of the vessel ; the companion steps which led to the quarter-deck came down at one end of it ; when the door at the top swung open with any lurch of the ship, the sky

crossed by the black lines of the rigging was visible, all reflected at the other end in a large mirror, cracked right down the centre and fastened in a tarnished gold moulding: on each side of the frame was a door. A warm red carpet was stretched on the floor-deck, and the long narrow table down the middle, seemed part of the construction. Along each side were the four small windows, so that a constant view of the dreary grey waves could be had, occasionally blurred and diversified by the splashes of white foam which flew past. Through these, a perpetual luminous trembling of green light was reflected on the rafters of the white-painted ceiling, from the waves outside. The whole apartment, with the delusive mirror at one end of it, was very long and dim and shadowy, and might have been said to look, save for the occasional slanting of the roof and sides, like a room in some old country-house.

Of the two doors at the stern end, that on the left led into a collection of small cupboards entitled the "Ladies' compartments," the other to where Denver's cabin was; there was supposed to be accommodation for thirty people in these places. All arrangements were very imperfect on board the return emigrant ship, though these three passengers, matured and used to the roughnesses of the early colonial life, but for the confinement, did not feel so uncomfortable as one might think.

Laura and Dorothy were the only two women on the ship; the cabin and passengers were attended to by a boy hardly twelve years old; and the two mates both lived in the high fore-castle near to the sailors, who, nineteen in number including the negro cook and the boy, could have been hardly enough to man efficiently the old-fashioned

ship, with its crowded sails and multitudinous ropes and spars.

So Laura and Denver were left together in each other's company, hour after hour, without separation or change. It was in the cabin I have described that Laura coming out of her room, in the morning, when they had long lost sight of land, saw Denver standing looking at the door she was opening, and recognised with a tremor the keenly handsome face she had seen so unexpectedly the day before. She blushed : maybe even then some particle of the intense feeling she afterwards came to regard him with was latent in her imagination, for the sun-burned features, the flashing eyes, and the dark curling beard and hair had been caught up as by some vagary of nature and stamped on her brain ; she had dreamt about him, and she was thinking about him even when she suddenly came face to face with him at this moment.

There was a disagreeable-looking woman standing beside her ; she was his wife.

Then her old servant friend fell ill, and in the trouble and grief of nursing her (as her life gradually ebbed and sank into stupor till she died), her mind was occupied, and she was almost worn out, as her paleness attested. She could have had no sleep for three days and nights, in spite of the unwilling assistance of the jealous wife. At last she was alone in the ship.

That evening, when Denver met her on the deck and spoke to her, there was some strange-toned fascination in the commiserating words he said to her ; and his gleaming eyes seemed to penetrate and quiver into her very soul, leaving a lingering impression, like the vibration of some

seldom-struck chord, in some sombre melody, that unexpectedly and inexplicably rouses and perturbs the mind's abstraction with inarticulate desire.

Between them both there seemed some hidden connection, a wordless compact, which neither could fathom, comprehend, or resist; it was as if their spirits had met in a dream, or as if they had been brought up together in childhood, but, changed by time, were unable to recognise each other, though their minds formed under the same influences and impressions had still in common the same bond of sympathy between them.

As the girl looked in Denver's face she answered him falteringly, but a heavy load seemed gone from her heart, and her grief and weariness seemed forgotten for awhile. It was as if some oppressive doubt (the origin or meaning of which nevertheless she was utterly ignorant of) had been suddenly solved or dispelled. Every tone of his voice and expression of his features showed that he felt for her and pitied her. Now to have the strong-willed sun-burnt colonist's compassion, appeared an unexpected atonement and compensation to her, in a place where she could only have expected to find a pitiless empty void of unknown faces.

Her mind, scarcely developed yet, was innocent as a child's, with the same flow of passionate feeling in its unsounded and unsuspected depths. I say unsuspected, because as yet no particular aspect of thought or passion was stamped on her face, despite a certain dreamy look, which at times seemed as though it might yet develope, at a touch, into something more defined in character; and this united perhaps with that strange fitful energy, under

which, when resisted, the weakest woman sometimes grows terrible, and which all women moreover are capable of. Now with two such natures as these, the seeds of compassion and gratitude, could not have fallen in a soil less fitted to restrain them from flowering into more definite expansion.

The commencement and extremes of human passion are dumb, and in speech well-nigh expressionless; only the soul comprehends what the tongue fails to articulate,—the first promptings of love. Notwithstanding that Denver and Laura were together all the day, save for the sullen unseen presence of the wife, yet I think that his heart and will would have failed him had he attempted to say in *words* what he *knew* they were thinking of, for a secret instinct told him she was beginning to love him. Now to love and to be loved was become a new principle in this man's life; before this vague unexplored something all else seemed to dwindle and die away. His life seemed turned into a trance like an opium-eater's, and when dragged from it, he could have turned fiercely on his disturber, only to sink back into its unrealized depths with redoubled longing. At first his wife Dorothy seemed a mere shadow to him, a relic of his former life; but as this antagonism between her and Laura deepened and developed, and the future began to loom up before him, he saw what step he had taken, and apathy turned into dislike and defiance, and then again into fierce smouldering hatred, as he felt the ties which bound him to this woman, unable as he was ever to avoid her presence in the ship. He knew, moreover, that she might at any moment reveal all that was passing to the sailors, though that could do

nothing to hurt them, save for the dread and pain Laura would have felt; so always, as by some instinct, they strove to conceal and bury their feelings from every one's sight or knowledge. Their love was not open or confessed, but yet begun; with a shrinking and half-shame on her part, while *he* wilfully shut his eyes to the truth, till the mists and night of passion gathered around and blinded him.

Laura knew Denver was a married man, his wife was in the ship with her day and night; even her very first knowledge of his passion for her was learnt from her conjectures on Dorothy's strange conduct and the way she watched them both, so there could have been no ignorance of her position. There was the gulf plain before her, but its very depth apparently lured her and dizzied her brain, for every minute she was nearer the edge!

The utter impossibility of separation, the absence, in the monotonous sameness of the voyage, of anything to cause reflection or distract her attention from the endless meditation that always circled helplessly round the spot it knew not how to avoid, the life on board ship, which seemed entirely a life of its own, lost to all the old limitations, meanings, and responsibilities; with its terrible *ennui* in which the mind seeks vainly over and over again, in the same objects, for something to interest itself in and attach itself to, all helped to ensure that she could no more help pondering over Denver, than a dazzled moth can help fluttering round a lamp: until gradually, and step by step, she came to love him and to know that he knew it. All these psychological phases occurred during the first three weeks of the voyage, and still they had never spoken one

word of their feelings, but love lies in wait and finds at last its fit time.

So all that fourth week the monotonous days passed slowly, while Dorothy watched, kept note of and saw through every subterfuge, as only a jealous woman can; and the Black Swan bearing them all, kept her undeviating course—hour by hour and day by day—a dark speck, tossed in the grey stupendous vastness of the ocean, seeming scarcely larger than the white-winged frigate-bird which, fed for good luck by the sailors, followed the foam in her wake.

Lost in the night save for her gliding meteor-like lamps, or seen again in the day, it was a strange contrast that the vessel presented—utterly without evidence as it was of the blinding maddening mist of passion which flooded her decks and absorbed the minds of these three people, wrapped up in themselves, and so oblivious to the vague dumb indifference with which the winds and waves—the limitless forces of Nature (neither pitiless nor compassionate) looked on—and refrained from crushing them,—poor over-bold intruders in their sanctuary. For, if one consider, a ship filled with human beings floating at the will of an ocean is ever a subject of awe. Yet could Denver have tried afterwards to recall his impressions of this period of the voyage in mid ocean, they would have seemed to him no more definite than the dim uncertain objects he had sometimes seen through an autumn mist, obscuring everything save the red lurid sun—this passion and longing!

One evening as the ship sailed before the wind, just after sunset, Laura stood leaning in the half-dusk over the

bulwark of the quarter-deck, watching the dizzy bubbling white foam, always changing shape and always gliding off from under the dark stern, when something moved near her; she turned,—Denver was standing by her side.

She must have been thinking about him, for she blushed deeply, but Denver could not see her face; the warm flush of light was fast fading out of the horizon-sky, the last faint gleams from the sunken sun were dissolving off the cloud-rims, and everything was fast growing indistinct, save where the dim circle of the moon brightened behind them as it hung low over the sea.

For a time both stood without speech, so close together that as Laura's arm lay on the bulwark, his touched and pressed against it. In the gathering gloom his eyes seemed to glisten and emit phosphorescent light, like some feline animal's. They stood there and still neither moved nor spoke, when Laura felt the arm tremble against hers, and suddenly with a wild unrestrainable movement he seized her hand and held it, covering the slender fingers with kisses over and over again, and then he paused as if he were fearful of his over boldness; but still clutching it convulsively, while his hot hands sent a perceptible tremor and thrill of their own excitable nerve-electricity up her arm, almost to her shoulder and throat. She left him her hand unresistingly, and the next instant he drew her towards him, and his bearded lips were pressed to her cheek and his arms were closed round her neck, while her lustrous hair fell about him, clinging like vine-tendrils. In the darkness the girl resigned herself to her lover's arms and clung to him as naturally and unaffectedly as a child sinks into slumber, while all the restrained longing

that over-filled his heart was poured forth in one impetuous passionate burst of eloquence. He held her unresistingly in his arms, and the inconceivable ecstasy of that moment was like the culmination and climax of an opium-eater's dream. All external nature was lost to him as he still spoke, and to her as she listened, clasped to him in the darkness, like two shadows fused by the twilight as their hearts throbbed in company, till the beat of one seemed almost to regulate that of the other; ignoring everything of their lives but themselves, till they seemed like two blind people clasped together in one perpetual night. The *love* whose secret promptings Laura had dreaded and trembled over had risen and conquered her. She told Denver she loved him.

Now these words fell in a third person's hearing. In the deep shadow in which they stood, cast by a large boat hanging just behind them over the opposite bulwark, a second woman was sitting unnoticed by them; when Denver came she got up and approached near enough to overhear them.

Meanwhile the night was come and the moonlight was yet very dim, and she could see nothing save a black patch in the shadow within which they moved, as if to hide themselves; as the ship shifted on her course. They remained as utterly unconscious of her presence as a bird is of the lynx which is hidden in the foliage waiting for a spring.

This hidden figure waited, listening to them stealthily, without a sign of vitality, till the last tremulous words left Laura's lips: then she seemed to quiver as if a tremor passed through her limbs, and she stirred in the darkness

as if she would have gone right up to them; then she changed her purpose, and turned and stepped noiselessly along the deck and down the cabin hatchway. Laura, as her head hung in a half ecstasy on her lover's shoulder, saw the *silhouette* of some figure emerge from the black mass made by the boat against the luminous sky, and appear with startling distinctness in the moonlight which streamed by on both sides,—a woman with her head turned towards them as she disappeared. Denver too must have seen her, for he moved back suddenly; and Laura could feel a clenching movement in the arms which clasped her, and his fingers tightened in hers, as she started half tremblingly—for it was his wife.

Neither spoke nor mentioned her, but some shadow seemed projected across them. A dark foreboding filled Laura's mind. During that short half-hour Dorothy's very existence had been driven out of her head, but now brought so unexpectedly to her view, she must have foreseen for a moment something of what must follow sooner or later, shut up for months in the loneliness of the ship as they were. But it was no use thinking; she had given her love irrecoverably to Denver.

Henceforth he must exist as a part of her being—it seemed to her that she could not live without him—she trusted blindly in him, and it made her shudder as she thought that Dorothy's claim over Denver might necessitate their separation, or prove that they had no right to love each other. God had made them for each other, and was *she* to part them?—it was too *unreal* for her to believe. Could she have really supposed Dorothy capable of holding them apart, she would have turned on her with fierce

unrelenting resistance, but as it was, cast-off from them and utterly helpless as she seemed, it was impossible to hate her:—rather never think of her at all. Even she could have half pitied her if she could have believed Dorothy to be actuated by any motive but hatred and revenge;—had not she, who loved Denver, more right to him than Dorothy who hated? Would they never be able to be together without her always haunting them as she did now? Had she not *come* right to him after all,—could he ever have loved her as, it seemed, he must have sworn to do? Impossible! Above all what would they and she do when the ship came up the river to London?

It was needless her attempting to disravel all these unanswerable questionings, as they fitted dimly through her mind and died out again, tangled involved problems, to attempt to solve which created an abyss of doubts which her soul dared not peer into. It was hopeless now; she had taken the draught and must abide by its intoxication, and the girl closed her eyes tight as if to shut out and avoid her mind's dubious speculations, and shrank and clung close to her lover's side again, who kissed her suddenly as if roused out of some fit of abstraction by her movement. Both as by some common dread avoided mentioning Dorothy; her name never once passed their lips from the first time they had spoken together.

At last they slowly separated as the ten o'clock bell sounded down the ship and a sailor came up on the quarter-deck to relieve the steersman. The man brought a lantern with him which he flashed open on them as he passed. This was hung up close by on the mast, looking ghastly and lurid in the colourless moonlight, as its glow fell round them and on their faces.

Dorothy's red and black cloak lay on the bench opposite.

In the flickering light there seemed something so strangely, almost wildly elated about the expressions of their faces, and Denver's eyes shone with such a glitter, that the man paused staring curiously at them for a moment: then without a word spoken he went on to his wheel, and the relieved steersman came by them silent too, and strode down the ship.

Laura at last went down to her sleeping compartment while Denver remained in the open air, pacing the decks, enveloped in his own thoughts. There was a slight mist overhead rising from the sea, and two or three white stars hung jewel-like in the vapour too brilliant to be absorbed by the moon, which now seemed to flood the whole sky with its light and radiance, and this one figure could always be seen as it emerged from the different shadows cast by the sails across the decks of the vessel.

One of the mates on guard for the night appeared side by side with Denver for a time as if talking with him: then Denver left him and presently came out into the full light on the forecastle where he remained by himself, hanging over the slight chain railing, looking right down the glittering shifting track of the moon over the waves they were traversing, but thinking little of what he saw. Somehow the reality of his life seemed to come back, now that Laura was no longer in his arms. The influence of his almost intoxication was passing away: in whichever direction he turned, the figure of his deserted wife seemed before him, threatening him, and he never seemed able to rid himself of the sickening sensation in his throat and heart, the half-morbid self-accusings which her pre-

sence appeared to create in him. Was this all he had got in gaining what he had so longed for? Laura *did* love him.

Denver was a fatalist so far that while no fiat of destiny appeared to oppose his inclination, his soul and body were seemingly passive in the hands of fate; but now that this contradiction to his will, or rather desire, rose before him in the person of his wife, all the latent energy of his nature strove to resist it. Yet the course of events seemed hopelessly beyond control and it was palpably not of that kind that could be averted by labour of mind or body.

Then his face turned inadvertently to the deep dark water beneath him. A cold shudder ran through all his limbs and he turned away, hardly daring to look on it, for fear some thought that came through his mind should lay hold of it again.

Dorothy had taken no notice of him for five weeks, yet she never seemed out of his sight. When he was below he could see her white face and dark eyes watching him through the window of her door; when he was on the deck he knew she was following him—she might be there now, and he turned round sharply as a rope flapped near him; and at night she had filled his dreams, till he had got to hate her more bitterly than can be conceived; and always his, till this night, unspoken infatuation for Laura's beauty, increased in proportion.

Suddenly he descended the iron ladder, and passing up the ship, flung himself on his berth, tired out in mind and body; while on deck above him and round the ship, save for the occasional shouting of the mariners on guard and

the creaking of cordage and slapping of the waves driven off the bows, the night silence was unbroken.

When Laura met Dorothy the next morning they were alone in the cabin. Laura trembled, for she saw instantly by Dorothy's white bloodless face that she knew everything, but the wife only looked at her pale features for an instant, while her lips quivered slightly, then she turned away, nor was she seen to look at her again. There was something so terrible about this appearance of restrained resentment, that Laura nearly fainted when she was gone.

Now to these two lovers, henceforth each day seemed like the past one. They loved each other secretly, and left together without interruption from the sailors, they passed their time either down in the cabin by day, or on deck in the night-time, hidden in the shadows of the sails, when possible on fine nights. So secretly was their intercourse conducted, that I hardly know if one man in the steerage guessed rightly what was passing at the stern-end of the ship, though that something *was* the matter ought to have been visible to all. The two officers of the Black Swan were supposed to take their meals in the cabin with them, but they never did so, finding perhaps Denver too morose and unsociable, and the wife never noticing them. Either they took offence at this, or they found themselves unable to converse freely before the women, but at any rate they had got to leave them quite to themselves, and did not trouble their heads about them.

They had now been at sea nearly seven weeks, so slowly did the ship sail, sometimes baffled and beaten back before the wind, sometimes tacking and changing sail, then making

smooth headway again for a while, and then again tossed helplessly about on the strong tempestuous waves, drenched half-mast high by their spray. At such moments Dorothy would lock herself up in her cabin, praying perhaps that the ship might founder and engulf them all, and Laura would shrink terrified by Denver's side; and all the crew would be stationed about the ship, letting the ropes fly, or hauling them tight and watching the sails, every bolt and timber creaking, while the great two-masted vessel was tossed and pitched from crest to crest of the waves, a very image and simile of humanity and its restless ruling passions. Always as the sea subsided they sailed on in a straight line for the Cape of Good Hope, still two hundred leagues distant.

Denver meanwhile grew more infatuated with Laura and more morbid when she was out of his sight, as he thought of the heaven which would surround him but for the presence and existence of the brooding revengeful woman his wife, who kept so silently to herself and yet seemed to threaten them so continually. So bitter to him at times did all this seem to bear, that he could hardly refrain from expressing his fierce hatred of her whenever she came across him. He knew from her strange silence and behaviour that some act of her resentment would occur before long, as surely as one knows from the sultriness and unnatural calm of the atmosphere that a tempest is brewing; what form the expression of her anger would take he knew not.

Strangely and almost fearfully contrasting in his mind was the gentleness of the love with which he regarded Laura, as the half-sublime, half-brute tenderness with which

the fierce luminous eyes of a tiger might look on its mate, or on its young; instinctively gentle beyond all conception.

Things went on thus interruptedly till it fell about as we have seen, that the wind died away and left the Black Swan stagnating in the sultry phosphorescent water. This was on the 9th of February, 1825. At the slow rate the ship sailed they would scarcely reach the Cape for five days yet. All that day the crew took the opportunity of shifting and re-arranging the cargo consigned to the African Colony, in preparation for their arrival. All was confusion throughout the ship, and when the night came still without a breath of air, the men were tired out and exhausted with their labour.

It was intensely dark, the moon would not rise till three in the morning, and the bewildering brilliancy of the stars was veiled and hidden utterly by the pall of dense clouds which hung passively over the ocean. Later in the evening a little wind showed overhead, dispersing the clouds slightly, but the Black Swan lay unnoticed below, with all her people slumbering on board her, except two, kept sleepless by their passions. Dorothy, who overhearing Laura promise to meet Denver on deck after nightfall, in a fit of the mad jealousy she could restrain no longer, was resolved to interrupt them, and Denver, who was pacing the deck, wild with impatience, because from some unexplained cause Laura did not come, until he mistook Dorothy for her, and both were inflamed and driven into the paroxysm of mad rage that I have before described.

CHAPTER IV.

DENVER's figure, lost in the blind tenebrous night, still leaned over the bulwarks, with his heart beating wildly and his brain as though entangled in the delirium of some vast fever-dream. Such a convulsion as his innermost soul must have undergone in the just ended altercation with his wife, such a convulsion I say could not easily subside again. Never could such a deed as his reckless maddened temper so narrowly escaped burdening him with, have seemed more degrading and cowardly and antagonistic to any human being than the past few moments now seemed to Denver. He had it is true more than once been unable to restrain the drift of his speculations, yet it had seemed to him that what he had thought of was only a remote *impossible* possibility, something *he* could *never* come to. Now this ordeal he had passed through was a proof of his reckless temper and moral weakness such as made the strong man shudder and shudder again as he thought of what he had escaped from and what a few more days or even hours might still bring him to.

Then, branded with God's curse on his forehead, could he still be Laura's reciprocated lover? how could she kiss him with unscorched lips? Yet it would have been Dorothy's own fault, or why should she have come there to deceive him and drive him mad?

Some of the old stubborn resistance was in his mind, a keen sparkle of fire gleamed in his eyes for an instant, caught from the lamp and dying out again.

What his wife had said concerning Laura's future had driven him beside himself, even more so from the incontrovertible truth of her taunt; he could but acknowledge it as true; it sickened him to think of stealing her affection in the way he had done here at sea, and then taking her off and losing themselves in the world, dishonourably and by stealth. Yet if he could gain the resolution to leave her, to fly from her, loving him as he knew she did, what would his life be afterwards? Only three nights back Laura, casually speaking, had told him she would kill herself if she were separated from him. Yet take advantage of her love for him, a love too entirely created by his own selfishness, he could not. And yet what was not his love for her?

It was indeed something scarcely conceivable, the more than idealised purity with which this rough-nurtured Australian thought of and worshipped the woman he loved. Yet ever as his mind would conjure up her sweet form and face, Dorothy's hated countenance distorted by passion seemed to float before his eyes and her threats would ring and vibrate through his brain, making his nerves quiver afresh as he thought of how inevitably he was tied to this woman, so more and more repulsive to him every time he thought of her, and of the utter difference between her and Laura.

Then he changed restlessly the arm he was leaning on, and turned staring blindly and helplessly into the darkness, which, diversified here and there with flashes of light where

the waves broke together, was as obscure and devious to look into as his own future life seemed to him. One leap out into it would end all !

Poor helpless waif adrift in the whirlpool of passion, was this the only antidote to the weary futile striving against destiny ? Had he been chained to the deck he would not have been more powerless to take the leap and leave Laura behind. At last he recoiled from the bulwark, and began pacing heavily up and down the deck. His mouth felt dried up and his throat parched, but he did not heed his thirst ; his eyes were hot and dizzy and his hands hung helplessly by his sides.

A single touch of the lips or pressure of the hand might have sufficed to quench and alleviate all this self-torturing care, yet where was she who alone could have given it ? Why had she not kept her promise ? He hardly dared to think.

Then he stopped suddenly, and filled with a vague sense of dread ; could Dorothy have seen or spoken to Laura ? But scarce an hour ago while his wife was with him, he had heard her singing in a way which showed her to be unconscious of any special uneasiness, and he felt a sigh of relief as he thought she could not have been aware of what had taken place. Would she not still come to him ? Ah if she only knew how he suffered ! and he stood listening in the sultry unbroken silence as if for some faint indication of her footsteps ; but even the rippling of the water was stilled, and the noiseless obscurity became terrible to him. The dull beating of his heart shook through his whole frame, but around the gathered and faultless night-silence seemed as it were to crawl up and envelope him

stealthily ; to fall like a heavy weight and oppression on his brain as if it would paralyse his limbs if he listened too long in it, and he pressed his hands wildly to his throbbing forehead as he resumed his desultory footsteps. Yet Laura whom he longed for so ceaselessly was lying under the very spot of the deck on which he stood.

There was a small kind of ground-glass skylight over the sleeping-cabins, halved by the division which separated the two compartments. It was close to the wheel and in the lamplight, and Denver, standing beside it, as he glanced into the impenetrable blackness it covered in, and in which Laura lay sleeping, had for an instant the idea of getting a light and going down to *her*. Only for one sight of her features, to stem and charm away this prolonged flood of morbid anxiety ! Only for one moment of forgetfulness ! But then again his heart sank within him and its blood seemed all to rush into his head as he thought of going like a thief in the night to gaze stealthily on her where she lay—with shut eyes and dreaming face—in bed, unconscious and sleeping. Her cabin was a place more sacred to him than the holiest sanctuary is to its most blind and bigoted devotee. As he stood still for a moment in the lamplight his face looked strangely careworn, then his figure disappeared again.

To some readers these detailed descriptions of the ceaseless, not to say unnatural remorse which embittered the love that had transfused itself into Denver's nature, may seem to indicate a want of *will*, or power of concentration in him ; that a man capable of such deep and passionate love could not, in the ardency of his attachment to the woman he loved, force himself to forget the ties which

bound him to the woman he hated.* But Denver's was no *ordinary* nature. He knew he was doing two wrongs, in obtaining Laura's love, and in deserting his wife, but in reality *all* his bewildering trouble was caused by his peculiar relation with Laura Conway, for if he, perhaps, could have loved her less, he would have been less conscientious. To this most utter and perfect, if at root selfish love of his, the idea of wronging her was a thought which made every nerve in his body recoil with abhorrence. He never dared or could, save in the tempestuous condition of mind which I described above and then only in the way of reasoning, admit such a possibility to himself. It was his wife's hinting at this which so maddened him. In truth I am afraid that no idea of anything he might do to wrong Dorothy took much part in his self-accusing; he merely strove to obliterate his own identity, his knowledge of his own position and Laura's, while Dorothy's continued presence rendered this futile and vain. So he hated her.

For to Denver now his old life in the wilderness of forest-tangled hills and half-civilised settlements was as though blurred over and forgotten. He could only remember how he had seen Laura first in the cabin-casement with the wind blowing through her golden hair—an inseparable remembrance which clung to him; his previous existence seemed a dream to him. How the mesmeric influence which hung unconsciously about Laura had so swiftly usurped his brain and filled the till then only vaguely felt void in his life, he could recall no more than an opium-eater can his first life-influencing vision-sleep. At times he

* May seem puerile, or untrue to nature.

almost felt as if the circumstances which environed him had been created at the moment when he first caught sight of Laura ; so that when he loved her most wildly, he found a wife also already made for him, and that then only when baffled and tantalised by injustice beyond endurance, he had despised and broken through every restriction of his Maker or destiny. Yet along with this, paralysing every effort to evade it, closer and closer the constant unchanging knowledge kept forcing itself upon him that he had married Dorothy,—had sworn to be faithful to her of his own free will,—and that every complication he was involved in was brought about by *himself*, and himself only. This thought maddened him.

Dorothy only remembered the marriage-vows he had sworn to her, to love her till death ; how in taking him, then a poor man, she had given up every chance for herself, and how, when she came to him prepared to fulfil her duties, to love him even, for he was strangely handsome in those days, she had been thrust back coldly, and after a time neglected utterly. It seemed as impossible for him to love her as for ice to form under the December sun, and she gave up every thought she might have had of endeavouring to please him. What psychologist can fathom or light up to view the soul of a neglected woman, hardened into strange formations of dull callous feelings ? sometimes like rocks which strike out flashes of hatred to every footfall, at other times dead and perished as the fallen leaves : love's sentiment and duty all frozen and congealed together, only predominant hate and passionate resentment alive and undying in the midst : truly such an existence is a deserted and sunless chaos that the mind

recoils from penetrating into. Other women have children to engross their attention; under the sunlight of their smiles and their unconscious laughter and happiness, the lowering clouds evaporate, the ice dissolves; but Dorothy had no children, nothing tangible to bind her to her husband. Placed in a strange country, in an unformed society where all must fight for themselves, where nobody could sympathise with her (though what mind was ever so strangely formed in this world as not to find its counterpart?) without her husband's love, without hope—how could her breath seem to her but as a waste gift of her Creator? She foresaw, as a kind of fatality, what sooner or later must come with a man of Denver's disposition, in the lawless state of society in which they lived; but strange to say time wore on and nine years had past, without anything to disturb them: she had almost forgotten her jealousy. Yet now, and where least it might have been expected, out in the dreary central Indian Ocean, with nothing else to occupy her brain, the thing she dreaded had come.

Dorothy knew her husband's character too well to attempt any personal resistance; but was her whole life, and joy in life, to be wasted while she looked on unresistingly? Separate him from her rival she knew she could not; but when she *did* strike she resolved it should be in a way which they little dreamt of.

But what could all this matter to Denver? The man was infatuated, bewitched; even in the deepest reveries of his secret remorse, that one face that filled his soul floated before his sight, mentally blinding him, as the sun does the eyes which have too boldly gazed at it. Even now his imagination was yearning and dilating on it, as he sat

down wearily on a bench just out of the lamplight, resting his tired brow and elbow on the bulwark.

In the half-unconscious lethargy his mind and body fell into, he must have remained some time, when he saw distinctly, but with half-closed unspeculative eyes, a light come out of the cabin doorway, some twenty feet from him and proceed down the ladder on to the foredeck, throwing a brilliant flickering light on everything but the bearer of it, who managed it apparently so as to remain unseen.

It flickered about up and down for several minutes without attracting his attention. There was a slight grating noise as if the hatchway coverings left unbattened by the sailors were being moved up, then the lamp or candle disappeared; there was not the slightest noise of a footfall and everything vanished into the night again. At last his brain grew so drowsy that his head sank completely on his arm and he was overpowered by sleep, though his dreaming brain still dwelt on the one all-absorbing topic of his life.

What a wonderful thing a collection of all the dreams which fill men's minds would be: what a demonstration of how rarely satisfaction ever follows yearning, of all the strange vicissitudes of dreaming and realization in which we ever live! All the illimitable night-silence and obscurity, with the blind yearning and remorse which it had brought to his soul, were no more to him.

He thought he was wandering once again in the arid Australian wilderness, and Laura was in his arms; he knew nothing of how he had gained her and hardly could credit the ecstatic happiness he felt. No hope deferred could baffle or tantalize his soul again to madness—*she*

was his—and as he gazed on the sweet flushed face which lay, half caressingly and half bashfully, on his shoulder, his arm and hand round her neck, and hidden under the soft profusion of hair, he kissed over and over again the thin transparent eyelids and warm lips. She was inconceivably beautiful.

Now the sun was sinking, and its slanting radiances transmuted everything they fell on into their own transient gold, and the coming night-wind, blowing from across the desolate purple hillsides, flung Laura's loose and tangled hair all glowing about her face and throat, till its clustering tendrils blinded her eyes and she paused disengaging herself from him to push it aside. As she stood with lifted hands, she suddenly disappeared; and he ran wildly over the rocks and in amongst the sage-brambles and alders, seeking her, but always ineffectually, till at last he thought he must have been cheated and deluded by a phantom. Then he sought for the lock of her brown hair she had given him: and next his heart, his hand clutched a bunch of dried leaves. The sun was sinking so low now, that only the extreme summits of the high hills were lit by its glow, and the swift Australian twilight was fast absorbing everything round him. In the climax of his perplexed despair, he resolved to fling himself into the deepening shadow beneath him, from the top of the high rock he had climbed to examine the surrounding and now indistinguishable country. The black night had swept down on him as he prepared to fling himself off—when he awoke with a start, his breast throbbing and his eyes staring blindly into the *real* darkness, with the perspiration

starting from his forehead. The circulation of his blood seemed as if it had stopped for a moment.

Just at that instant, as he sat trying to collect his thoughts, he felt something scramble over his feet, and looking down and into the circle of light near him, he saw two or three rats, emerging from the shadow, cross through the light and hurry into the opposite obscurity again. One stood up in the manner so characteristic of its kind, no matter what danger they may be flying from, rubbing its neck and whiskers carefully with its wet paws; then it deliberately inspected the end of its tail and disappeared after them, followed by others. He could see their keen teeth and fierce little eyes glistening as they caught the light. These animals, usually so watchful, did not appear at all attracted by his movement and they were evidently scared already, as if in the presence of some greater and common danger; thus they roused Denver's attention in spite of himself; he could not make out what was the matter with them and had never before noticed a rat in the ship.

Now as he turned his head, looking unconsciously down into the impenetrable darkness from which the rats came he saw the red signal lamp ahead, obscured and blurred beneath a large luminous mass of vapour which hung round it and was coloured by its light, and staring intently at it for some seconds, he saw that the mist was in front of the lamp about halfway down the ship. The thing looked so unnatural and lurid, and moreover so conspicuous, that even in his half-sleepy surprise he started up with his eyes still fixed and staring on it. He was still trembling and bewildered, and his senses as yet almost benumbed by his interrupted dream.

While he was gazing on this strange appearance, hardly knowing what he was about, or what to think of it, a peculiar but startling and unmistakable smell of burning floated by him, filling and pervading the air. There is something in the smell of fire which alarms more quickly than any other sign of danger, as the hiss of some deadly snake does. Once before in his life, Denver remembered (in the dense interior of the inland forest) waking up uneasily in the night, while the wind passed him tainted with such a smell, and now a vivid recollection of what followed flashed into his mind, as he looked anxiously up at the red smoke-like substance in front of the lamp. He stepped forward and trod on something which gave a shrill scream—it was another rat.

All at once, as he remembered these animals, there seemed no longer room to doubt that something had gone wrong in the ship, and the idea took possession of him that she must be on fire—somewhere underneath in the fore-hold, and that the heat had driven the rats out of their places of refuge. The smoke, for such it was in reality, still drifted in the light, it even seemed increasing in density. Something was, evidently, amiss, but he still for an instant stood uncertain, when suddenly all uncertainty was driven out of his mind by a fearful crash somewhere down in the ship, soon followed by another. The sound came as from the fore-hold, and in the deep silence which succeeded he could distinctly hear a crackling as of dry wood burning. The sound was enough to make a man of nervous temperament lose his self-possession, but Denver's weather-hardened frame had never known fear, and this now most positive danger seemed rather than

otherwise to rouse his faculties of brain and nerve; and yet still he stood uncertain for an instant whether to rush down and bring Laura on deck, or to abstain from alarming her needlessly and run to the forecabin; when the steersman behind him, unseen and forgotten in the dark, awakened by the same noise, rose to his feet—half dazed for an instant—and nearly tripped himself up with the string he was attached to. This man seemed instantly (as shading the lamplight off his eyes with his hand he caught sight of the smoke) to comprehend what was the matter, and shouted out wildly, “The hold’s on fire! Fire! Fire!” and tugging desperately against the cord broke it, and stumbling up against Denver, with a savage oath, he darted by him into the obscurity, shouting over and over again the cry that strikes such terror into the heart—a sound intensified into a nameless horror to the sailor when at sea.

It went all through the vessel; in an instant a confused sound of footsteps and voices became audible; some man shouted out to know what was the matter, and was answered by the cry of “Fire!” again and again repeated in every conceivable tone. If the ship was on fire, it was at least providential that the calm still held out, for they all would be able to concentrate their whole efforts on quenching it without interruption; and certainly there *was* burning somewhere, for the crashing and crackling momentarily augmented and it appeared to burst and roll through the whole ship.

The confusion and clamour rose and increased, as Denver breathlessly followed the man down the ship, and a keen fierce glow burst suddenly from the opening in the un-

battened hatchway, such as might have come through the chinks in the door of a furnace—fierce rays of light that shot through the darkness, light which flickered on the wildly alarmed faces of the negligent sailors who had all scrambled out, on hearing the terrible alarm-cry as it rose in the night.

There must have been some unusually inflammable material in the hold, for the sudden fire seemed already quite to rage under the deck, and astonishing and incredible was the rapidity with which all this had come about; and mournful must have sounded the unexpected terrible shouting of "Fire!"—and the way the men cried out to each other, in the torpid stillness over the waves, for miles on miles round the ship:—only there were none to hear.

No one who has not witnessed the effects of such an alarm as this can comprehend the horror of it, or realize the sensations of those, who failing to baffle the flames, see nothing before them, as they retreat foot by foot, but a choice between two deaths, *Fire* or *Water*; their home a burning furnace, floating tossed about, on the immense sea. The two elements most utterly opposed to each other, combined for the destruction—the pitiless annihilation—of the common enemy, man.

Among these men thus hastily collected on the deck, everything was in uncertainty. None knew how long the fire had burned, whence it came, or how to get at it. The flare through the broad hatchway while it lasted, lit up the rigging and spars overhead like the intertangled branches of a forest by fire-light, but by a common impulse the hatch was slammed down and fastened, for to allow

ventilation was to destroy one of their few chances of safety, for as the fire was still confined to the entrails of the great hull, it might yet be stifled and suffocated in its own smoke. If they could have seen how among the sacks and barrels in a corner of the hold underneath them, the fire flared up fiercely and increased at every instant, they might have thought differently, but the shutting down of the entrance had reduced and deafened its noise to a dull distant muttering, which was less terrifying, though every now and then a loud crackling gave intelligence as to what was really going on. The imminence of the danger, which had so suddenly invaded their sleep, seemed to bewilder and paralyse the efforts of every one. The men ran against each other in the dark swearing as only excited sailors can, all shouting questions at once, which none could answer, and without the slightest discipline in their movements and the utterly black night hid everything they most wanted in their confusion. In these days such catastrophes are often set down to the rats, for it is well known that these animals ravenously excited over phosphorus steal lucifer-matches and carrying them to their nests ignite them with their gnawing; thus setting fire to the things round them: but in the days of which I am writing the tinder-box was the only means of procuring fire. A man was endeavouring to get a light from one of these (at present) old-fashioned contrivances—why they did not make use of signal lanterns I cannot say—the others all were silent, waiting anxiously round him, for none could see what they were about, and only the sharp chipping of the flint mingled with their suppressed breathing could be heard for a few moments. Then a spark

flashed brilliantly in the darkness, the tinder ignited and was blown up by half-a-dozen eager bearded mouths soon illuminated by its glow. The match was lit and then in the flaring effulgence, an unexpectedly wild scene came out, delineated in wildly powerful light and shade, where the breathless silence and obscurity had reigned so supremely scarce ten minutes before. What a study of expression in the faces of these fellows gathered on the deck!—their gleaming eyes, brown features, and bronzed skins—and above all their strange attire. Where in the dark not a single trace of humanity had seemed to exist, a crowd of wildly gesticulating figures were rushing about, all just as they had tumbled out of their hammocks, some in red shirts, others in their trousers and drawers, one man, a negro, with nothing at all of covering to his bare brown skin; his eyes flashing with fright like diamonds.

Shutting the hatchway down over the fire, seemed as if it had conquered it for an instant, and they stood round it panting with the exertions they had made to batten it; and the wild disorder created in their minds on waking up so suddenly face to face with the violent element began to calm again.

The fire might still be got under, its importance seemed to have been overrated, but the deck was getting hot under their feet as they stood on it, and none knew what to do.

The steersman left them and ran back to get the tarpauling he had covered himself with at the helm; this was taken and stuffed into the chinks of the hatch through which a sudden puff of smoke swirled out in their faces

and joined the mist overhead. This proved the fire to be still encroaching, and a fresh burst of alarm took possession of them. Denver was not to be seen among these men.

A sick sailor unable to move, and carried out of the steerage by two of his fellows, his face and limbs wasted by debility, was taken past and laid on the quarter-deck beside three other figures, two of them women, who stood there. Two of these as far as could be seen in the sombre light which reached them, formed a group, of which one was a slight figure with pale terrified face, standing half supported in the embrace of the other: some man whose features could not be seen. The third was looking on with a half-sullen and half-careless expression on her face, though it might have been curious to watch the sudden start and the *look* which came into her eyes as she heard Denver's voice behind her talking to Laura: but apparently she was not in the least concerned at the violent tumult, and the shoutings and lights which had broken out so unexpectedly in the still midnight.

When Denver knew what really was the matter, and that the ship was alarmed, he turned back up the deck, and trembling with haste, sprang down the companion-steps, and groping his way through the pitchy blackness of the cabin, came to Laura's door. I mean the door which led to the inner apartment, for he had never been further inside. He called her name, and the door opened and something pushed against him in the dark. It was Laura, for she was already awake standing listening to the trampling of feet overhead, and the confused shouting.

Just now a fresh burst of the sounds was heard as if something new was taking place, and such was Denver's excitement that he could hardly stay to tell her what the alarm was about, but taking her up in his strong arms, he literally carried her out on to the deck, for the perilous fire seemed so deadly and near to them then, that he could not endure to leave Laura out of his sight for even one instant—in the dark cabin—where the flames might, for what he knew, break out at any moment. She was scarcely dressed save for the night-gown she slept in, and its hem fell on her bared and inexpressibly delicate feet: but a heavy cloak was thrown over her shoulders which concealed her form.

Dorothy had been below: in the dark Denver stumbled against his wife, and she now followed them out and up the steps. When they were on deck, the lanterns had been lighted hastily and placed so that they could see what the men were doing.

There was no fire-engine to the ship, but all the available buckets had been brought up and filled over the side. The waves they were dipped into were alive and dancing with phosphorus, and the water that filled them was coated with its pale flame; they were placed on the fore-deck which was splashed all over with wet, and gleamed brightly as the lamplight fell on it. No one seemed to know where to fling their contents and they stood there unemptied and disregarded. A still larger piece of tarpauling had been procured so as to stop the draught through the hatch and stifle the fire: it was laid completely over it, but the thick vapour still escaped, endlessly pouring through some aperture which they could not dis-

cover in the darkness. There must have been some unknown and hidden source of ventilation in the hold, for the sullen hissing and crackling under foot still went on; it even increased and the deck they stood on grew unendurably hot and the water dried perceptibly as it leaked from the buckets.

The opaque white smoke, varied here and there with a swirl of black, now began completely to envelope and hide the rigging overhead; the way the danger thus seemed to increase without anything of it being *seen*, while the flames could be *heard* so plainly, struck more consternation into these men and bewildered them more, than if the fore-castle itself had been blazing with fire.

It was indeed a strange waking for them—to be called out in the midnight on to the deck, to conquer a hidden and dreaded enemy, none the less feared because inanimate, and to have to stand helpless on the hot planks under the blinding smoke, with a presentiment in their hearts that it was too late, and that all their efforts would be useless, even if there still remained time to apply them.

Now while Denver and Laura (he for the moment unable to tear himself away, and she clinging to him) were watching this scene from what used to be called the baricado of the Spanish quarter-deck, not knowing whether the fire were being got under or not, a sailor rushed through the door at the foot of the fore-castle followed by a large ape that he had unchained (probably to give it a chance for its life) and shouted and cried out that the bulk-head which separated the fore-cabin or steerage from the hold was splitting and burning through, so that the compartment was filled with smoke; and this was true,

for the vapour began to issue out of the door he had just come through.

There was a sort of recoil among them all as they heard this: those who were filling the buckets by their ropes over the side left their occupation abruptly, and from their action, it seemed for an instant as though they were going to forsake the deck and leave the ship to its fate. Anything that was said was lost in the confusion and noise; however the first mate persuaded them to form a line with the buckets; but the fact was there were not enough men to the big ship, and the few there were, were quite untrained, and unprepared for so terrible an emergency.

Nevertheless they all now hastily caught up the full buckets and began passing them down to the mate and five of the men who had disappeared after him through the entrance to the fore-cabin, but this they did with a feeling of despair as to any result. A loud hissing and spluttering showed evidently that something had been reached—it was fearful to listen to. Then they heard faint cries as if for help, and all except the fire became quiet. The emptied buckets were not passed back again, and the men, gathered round the entrance with fresh relays, began to grow terribly anxious and to look into each other's faces in consternation. One at last tried to penetrate into the smoke.

The way which led to the steerage under the fore-castle was a simple ladder of iron placed so that one came down facing sternwards, and a good way under where the entrance was.

There was no sound for a time, only the subdued noise

of the fire—and the smoke blown in the men's faces. In a while the man who had gone in, reeled out among them again, half suffocated with the atmosphere he had endured for half a minute. Hardly able to speak at first, he at length told them that the others must be lying stifling in the darkness, and that it was impossible to breathe below.

One man had meanwhile called the attention of the others to Denver, still standing on the quarter-deck with Laura, but in the dusk it could not be seen whether it was his wife or the other woman. Perhaps these sailors merely thought that the strange self-contained man, with the gleaming eyes and worn face, was a coward, and frightened to come to them, for they none of them could have known the real cause which detained him, and it only looked as if his wife were clinging to her natural protector; indeed, they had little or no thought for them. The second mate, a black-bearded sailor in a shirt and trousers, did call to him once, but then immediately tried to descend the iron ladder, holding a lighted lantern which brightly illuminated the dense smoke streaming through the aperture. As might have been expected, he was driven back again; it was useless any longer to attempt assistance, the men must have been dead by that time, and it would have been impossible for any one to bring a senseless body up the ladder during the short instants they could have existed there. At length they retreated back out of the clouds and gusts of livid choking vapour, and six out of their number were gone, while they had irresolutely stood by.

It would be difficult to describe the effects of this shock

on them, it seemed as if all were lost. One man ran nearer the quarter-deck to get a draught from the water-barrel, and called out apparently to encourage the two women, "There's no danger, we shall get you all off safely if the fire spreads:" but his actions belied the assurance of his words, and the next instant another shouted both to him and to Denver to come down and help. Then some other voice shouted, "Get up the cabin-barrel of water on deck;" and these were the only articulate words heard in all the confusion and clamour of sound which rose and fell at intervals, for all speech was now becoming drowned in the noise of the hidden fire.

Denver tenderly separated himself from the arms which still detained him, and followed the first-named man down into the smoke and confusion on the deck. The smoke was getting so thick there now, that the forms of the sailors were all blurred together, and they could be heard coughing as it got into their lungs. These fellows were all strangers to him, with unknown faces and voices, despite his having been confined in the same ship with them for eight weeks. As he got to them he heard one man saying, "It's narry use our stopping here; let's launch the boat while there's time, or our deaths are on our own heads. The fire 'ul burst out in a while and then it 'ul be too late."

"We can't do nothing," another said.

"We'll wait till that then, and then we shall see what we're about," said a resolute voice. "I've worked in the old ship off and on, man and boy, these forty years since we took her, and I don't leave her till I'm driven."

The speaker was a man of about fifty, short and thick-

set, and with a grey beard cropped close to his face, and small keen grey eyes; he stood perfectly calm and resolute, his jaws munching a lump of tobacco. The others round him displayed no such presence of mind, and did not scruple to show the alarm and despair which were wildly depicted in their faces. The ship-boy that was cabin attendant was there with frightened eyes and livid face, notwithstanding the half-confidence he must have felt in the sailors around him.

One of these clutched Denver's arm, and his fingers trembled the while.

"What could they do, only twelve men, and the turpentine stored below?" he asked. Denver had known of no inflammable material in the hold, and this seemed to explain the virulence with which the fire burned; but he made no reply, his eyes were wandering uneasily through the smoke towards the place he had just quitted.

As I have said before, the fire being hidden only made the danger seem more imminent and to be dreaded. It was impossible to reach it: they had done all they could, they could now only wait till the flames made their appearance, and they all stood pressed together irresolutely as if only waiting for such a pretext to make their escape.

The smoke swirled in long lurid wreaths over their heads, and now there first began to be sparks in it; they all gazed silently upon the first one that appeared, till the zigzag course of this flickering herald of the coming fire went out in the smoke, extinguished for want of air. None of them knew where it came from, nor indeed asked: each looked where the others looked till they all must have seen it, and

Denver alone started slightly as it seemed for an instant inclined to shoot off in Laura's direction.

All their minds must have been made up by this time, and they stood there silent, and probably in despair as far as the safety of the Black Swan was concerned. I only wonder they were not already engaged lowering the boat and provisioning it while they yet had time; but a sort of stupor seemed to have fallen on them, a kind of lull which always preludes the most tumultuous efforts in nature or man. Some of these men must have had wives or loved relations in this world, but no man spoke what he thought, only they looked in each other's eyes, and each must well have known what his fellow was thinking about. Indeed the sailors knew only too well what chances of safety there were—nearly a thousand miles off shore, in an open boat on an unfrequented sea.

Soon their sole thought would no doubt be centred on securing their safety: but in the meantime, during the momentary pause, these sailors, so suddenly and awfully reduced to the brink of despair, formed a strange puzzling spectacle of apparent indifference, while their unchained monkey, in weird contrast to their silence, sat on the bulwark, where it screamed and gibbered at the smoke in aimless rage and terror, its face the while looking perfectly devilish in the half-light.

Thus they waited for the unquenchable fire to make its appearance and end their uncertainty; for with something tangible they could at least know what to do. It might even be no exaggeration to state that they wished for the light of the expected flames, to guide and assist their efforts, and they had not long now to wait.

Every one of them had procured some covering to protect his feet, or they could never have stood there, so intense was growing the heat of the deck. The bright sparks were now constantly issuing out of the door in the fore-castle, but they had become too common to attract notice. Two or three men had suddenly and seemingly without purpose taken the tarpauling off a corner of the hatch, and were endeavouring to pour the remaining pails through a chink so as to create a volume of steam underneath ;—as the liquid splashed on the planks around them, it hissed and vanished away in its own vapour.

They had better have been gone while there yet remained time, instead of trifling thus with the element they had failed to conquer, seeing that nothing they could do now was of any avail, for no doubt the whole interior of the hold was become one volume of fierce immitigable flame. Even now as they stood there, it hissed and spluttered up through the very hole they were trying to pour the water through, like some angry fierce animal enraged at the efforts made to ensnare it. Suddenly the boards of the hatch itself cracked, split, and took fire with the intense heat, the tarpauling shrivelled up, and all finally gave way ; one immense mass of flame, first forcing itself, past at one corner, rushed and swept clean through the re-opened hatchway like an explosion of gas through the shaft of a mine. This reached and flickered high into the air, unexpectedly shooting millions upon millions of sparks, like flakes of fire, into the deep unfathomable blackness overhead ; spangling the dark sky like clusters of stars, and falling in fiery showers, spluttering in the waves round the doomed vessel. A kind of hissing like that of the

wind through the leaves of a tree, became audible round the ship, resulting from the contact of the sparks with the water, while the instantaneous glare must have been seen for miles, as it fell kindling along the dreary deserted wastes of the midnight sea.

All this happened in an instant. The astonishing transformation of the night, flashed so suddenly on the bewildered brains of the men gathered round, that it made them as mad, and reckless, as a stampede of frightened animals, and they lost what little self-possession remained to them.

Now as the explosion burst upwards with its fiery frightful heat, as though about to rend up the small space of deck between the hatchway and the bulwarks, these thirteen last men, terrified by its snake-like tongues of cruel flame, were, no doubt, about to rush aft up the deck, there to begin lowering the boat, so as to put off after getting what they could into her. It was scarcely half an hour since the fire was first discovered; but now to their terrified imaginations, the entire entrails of the ship must have been wasted away and gutted, so that the bottom could be but a mere shell ready to split up and sink at any minute: so when the destroyed hatches fell in, or rather were flung out over their heads, the sudden rush of fire in their faces was so scorching that (standing as they were nearest the bows of the vessel) they all scrambled and retreated back to the yet intact forecastle. One man dragged the boy with him, and the monkey followed on all fours howling with terror.

Thus they all disappeared in the smoke which veiled the

fore part of the vessel before they knew what they were about. All power of thought was driven out of each man's head, and a nameless simultaneous terror seized them, levelling the human intellect almost to that of the monkey which followed them:—the mere instinctive clutching for life, no matter how delusive or transitory the means of safety.

Meanwhile the edges of the deck took fire and burned up like tinder, making a return past the flaming hatchway all but impossible, after a few seconds. Two men, however, recovering themselves in time, managed to rush back and join Denver on the other side, for he, full of dread anxiety and always looking towards Laura, had remained nearer her end of the vessel, and had so escaped being driven the other way.

The rising fire, with its smoke, prevented anything taking place at one end from being seen at the other end of the Black Swan, and prow and stern were prevented from communicating by the centre.

CHAPTER V.

Now there were six people in all assembled on the after part of the ship: the two mariners who had rushed past the terrible heat and flame on to the quarter-deck; Denver and his wife; the sick man who had been brought out and laid there (he was stiff and rigid—dead, for probably the shock of these events operating on some heart-complaint had carried him off); and Laura Conway, in her blue gown which she had apparently got and slipped on: the hem of the night-dress fluttered underneath it, her cloak having dropped off. She stood there too horror-stricken to cry out, or even to tremble. Her clustering hair and her eyes were wildly lustrous with the glow from the flame, but her beautiful face was pallid and her lips as bloodless as the dead man's beside her. As her lover Denver came up the short ladder he heard his name called faintly, and as he sprang to her side uttering some inarticulate exclamation she fell into his arms, and lay there lifeless, but for the low convulsive sobbing with which she drew in her life-breath. She had swooned. I think it must have been more terror for his safety than fear for herself that she suffered from, perhaps both combined.

Denver kissed her dissevered lips, once, long, and passionately, and as he drew his face from her and supported her form in his strong arms, he could feel her heart beat-

ing against his breast,—it seemed for the moment to hold his very soul entranced.

At last slowly and reluctantly, he placed her on the deck, her head still resting on his knee; he did not notice his wife looking down on them, for kneeling there as he was, his whole attention was concentrated on his one object. I know not what sentence or word could describe Dorothy's expression and features, as, for that one instant, she glared down on them: then she abruptly turned and stared steadfastly and blindly on the raging flame, her eyes glittering and blazing with a kind of mad reckless contempt, till they seemed almost to reproduce the fire and light they fronted.

But of this Denver saw nothing, and at last he let Laura sink on the deck, and getting up, looked on the conflagration of which the flames now seemed to envelope the whole middle of the ship, even as a gigantic snake might wreath itself round the limbs of a gazelle. For indeed the whole middle part of the Black Swan was by this time burning—seized in the convulsive unrelinquishing grasp of the shuddering element.

The warmth which reached them grew at times almost to furnace-heat, and the stench of the burning tallow and turpentine was becoming sickening and unendurable. It was a scene to enthrall and stupefy the mind with its intense horror, and Denver as he stood over Laura's inanimate form, gazed at it with a sense of his own helplessness, strong as he was, till the feeling became oppressive. It is not merely the eyes of a snake which fascinate its intended victim, but the acute and vivid imagination of the peril which goes with them. Extreme danger has a ten-

dency to paralyse all organizations much in the same manner, and Denver stood for a while unable to withdraw his eyes and to all intents and purposes fascinated.

Could any one from a bird's-eye point of view, high overhead, have seen what was passing on the miles of dark sea below, he might have noticed (for the present, miles away on the face of the unseen ocean, but rapidly approaching) an elongated triangle of pale glimmering fire, sweeping and fusing its way along the surface of the water, the point or apex of it seemingly impelled into the glare which encircled the burning ship. In a while it was lost, as it entered and swept over and round the lurid light. It was the wind, coming direct down on the Black Swan! What hope now remained for her?

The elements seemed at last, as if in shame, to have shaken off their torpid contempt, but in all this wilderness of sky and water, strange that fire should have been the one chosen element of destruction. Now, moreover, as I have said, the *wind* was come to its aid, and what hope could be left them? It was the wild irregularity of *method* by which Nature carries out her most faultless plans, but there was about it a deep wickedness, that seemed like what the human intellect alone could have devised.

Denver feeling almost instinctively, and without looking, that the two sailors were lowering the boat, remained passively over Laura, ready to lift her in when all should be prepared; and so absorbed was his mind in the fire, while he bent over her, that he did not hear (or thought one spoke to the other) when one of them called to him to run down and get up the keg of drinking-water from the corner of the cabin, as mentioned before. It is doubtful,

if he had gone to bring it up, that he could have managed it by himself, but just at that moment he had thought he could distinguish faint but incessant cries, coming through the lulls in the crashing of the fire, though nothing could be seen through the smoke. It must have been the men on the forecastle; they could in no way pass to the quarter-deck where the yawl, their only boat was. The pinnace had been damaged in a storm.

Now at that moment the smoke cleared away from a part of the rigging of the foremast, and the light of the fire giving full that way, two men were plainly seen clinging in the ropes, their faces and hands vividly illuminated by the light from beneath: then the cleared-away smoke swirled down again, and all was hidden of their apparently useless struggles. He saw and heard no more. He could do nothing, and dared not leave Laura; only his blood chilled for one moment as he heard some faint and inarticulate cry of human agony amid the confusion of sounds.

As he glanced up through the rigging above him, for other traces of the crew, he noticed a white speck, turned red by the fire-light, wheeling in long circles round the ship; coming nearer to it at times, then receding, and then, as if unable to resist some unconquerable impulse, it still came nearer to it again, till at last his keen-sighted eyes, strengthened by long practice in the sheep-walks, could, by straining through the darkness, make out plainly the form of the albatross, which had followed them all the voyage through, and which Laura had been used to throw ship's biscuit to. He could observe by the way it flapped its long wings, that it was disturbed by the unusual sight

beneath it, yet still it descended in its wheeling flight. Just then to his surprise he felt in his face one of the first fitful gusts of the now strengthening wind, and simultaneously the fire and smoke swooped and reeled over, and flakes of flame began to be driven down the ship by other than self-agency. Outside the lurid glare over the sea, dimly bringing out in glimmering fire the western verge of the horizon against the dead night, the waves were alive with phosphorus, but faintly, and ghastly pale they seemed, contrasted with the red glare of the conflagration. In the sky, just then, quite suddenly, a few most exquisitely brilliant stars showed themselves, and the wind still gaining force, great vaporous masses of cloud began to float and roll over the firmament. A few of the nearest caught dimly the reflection of the fire and glowed as they passed over the ship, but the greater part being involved in the darkness, the eye could hardly make out if it were not the planets themselves that were moving.

It is impossible to represent the brilliant contrast between these and the utter blackness they seemed fixed in; but no one of them was more cut off from communication with the other worlds, than the Black Swan now seemed from all help, in this dreary central sea. Nothing, better than these pitiless unchanging night-jewels, could have typified the utter and stupendous loneliness of the doomed ship. These stars will shine through all eternity, for them time has no existence: but alas! the transitory radiance of the Black Swan was soon to be extinguished in the secret depths of the night it floated in.

There could be no doubt that the forecastle was burning, the whole forepart of the vessel was probably being gutted,

and the fire would soon have to spread further sternwards, if from mere lack of material. The strong oaken foremast still towered among the manifold embraces of the flames. One could see, by the intermingled column of fire and smoke, swaying from side to side and driven high into the air, that the hull was moving underneath it, and slowly following the large volumes of smoke which rolled away to windward, illuminated in the darkness by the countless particles of burning matter, and fire-flakes it carried with it. These fiery sparks constantly swarmed off, whirling like legions of fire-flies and falling into the spluttering waves, while the livid and gyratory wreaths of vapour, either dissolved, or driven off too far for the light to fall on them, were lost in the night.

We must now revert to the spectacle presented on the stern of the Black Swan, with Denver's strong form standing passively over the prostrate figure of the girl, the dead sailor stretched almost at her feet, and Dorothy, behind, standing close to the mast, and looking so obstinately at the fire. Did we not know the passions which possessed the secret hearts of these people—Denver's intense love as he watched Laura's face, and the fear, almost to agony, which overwhelmed him to see it all unconscious: then the jealous hatred of the wife which seemed to make her accept passively, nay even to welcome, the catastrophe—did we not know all this, these three would have seemed most strangely apathetic to what was going on round them. The two men near them were struggling violently to launch the large boat; in fact they also knew of the state of the other men on the fore-castle and would have attempted to row round to them could

they have managed it. Their strength however was insufficient, nearly five minutes had been lost—an incredible lapse of time to men in their position. They had loosened the knots of the ropes, and got everything ready to let go; their long bright knives in their teeth to divide the cords if necessary and save every second of time they could. The lurid fire-light made their faces look fearfully savage and desperate, as they thus toiled away for their lives, but the boat still hung obstinately on the *in*, or deck, side of the bulwark; the davits to which she was slung must have been stiffened with rust; nothing they could do would move them. One of the men suddenly looked round over his shoulder and seeing Denver, rushed to him and dragged him by the arm, shouting in his ear,

“For God’s sake, man, come and bear a hand if you wish to get the girl off alive, or we shall all be burned up like rats! We’re on fire under us!”

This mention of saving Laura, struck unconsciously the right chord in Denver to make his whole being vibrate with the strength of a god, and as the three men, united now, rushed at the boat, their shoulders sufficed; the stiff supports moved with a groan and the long curved keel and lines of the boat swung free over the side. The slip-knots were loosened, and with the care of expert sailors, yet with a rush and a plunge that sent the salt spray up in their faces, the great boat was launched beneath them.

Not one instant too soon—for a dense column of smoke and sparks at that very moment burst from the cabin-door and swirled out all round the deck and stern, obscur-

ing everything. Immediate safety of life was all they had time to think of then ; with his keen eyes nearly blinded Denver seized up Laura's inanimate form as if it were lighter than a child's, and leapt from the bulwark like a tiger, and into the boat. There was no time to reflect, it was nearly twelve feet under him, and the double-weighted concussion, all but staved the bottom out, and the boat rocked and swayed so that he could not keep his feet as he laid down his precious burden on her rough planks ; with less case-hardened sinews than the Australian's, a dislocated ankle would most likely have resulted from the plunge, adding fresh complication to their ill-fate, but wiry as a mountain goat, his limbs escaped unhurt. There was not a moment to be thrown away. Turning back to the lurid suffocating mist he had just leapt from, he perceived the two men left on the deck in the act of lifting Dorothy over the side ; the next instant she fell and he caught her in his arms, and almost shrank from her, despite the strong excitement he was under : then there was a complete lull for a time.

He had placed Laura with her head resting on one of the thwarts of the boat, and now he stooped over her and covered her tenderly in the cloak which still clung round her form. She was yet in a state of syncope or swoon, not of unusually long duration, for it was scarcely twenty minutes since she first lost consciousness, and perhaps it was well for her to have thus passed through the dreadful perils she had been exposed to, but Denver who perhaps had never before seen a fainting fit, must have thought she was dead or dying, he could not accept in patience her lifelessness. His limbs trembled, and in

his agitation he had to hold on by the gunwale of the boat to steady himself, and as he hung over her dreading lest her soft sweet eyes would never look on him again, he forgot all else. However, when he felt her pulse it was still working, and her heart throbbed and fluttered like a bird's when he pressed his hand against it, and so this somewhat reassured him.

Dorothy had meanwhile sat herself down in the stern-sheets, her elbows on her knees, and her face and eyes covered, and hidden in her thin convulsive hands. The boat lay in deep shadow by the side of the ship, save when the point of some flame leaped and flickered higher than usual and lit them up for a moment, but there was no light from the cabin windows above them, which showed the fire had not reached there yet, though from one which was open a few thin swirls of smoke were issuing. The two sailors had disappeared into the smoke, unnoticed by Denver, having gone to get the water-barrel they had ineffectually shouted to him about.

Now as Denver was bending over the unconscious figure in the bottom of the boat, the light fell full on them without dying out again as before, and looking up he perceived they were no longer alongside of the ship, but that there was a gap which widened even as he looked at it. The wind before this had ceased blowing for an instant, but a fresh gust seemed to have just begun; when it stopped again, the motion of the vessel stopped too, she seemed turning round slightly with the relaxed impetus; this drove the smoke down over the stern as I have described, and now again the vessel began to veer round in the wind, and thus it happened that they were floating

nearly forty feet from the side before he saw what the matter was. The ship of course went before the wind much faster than they, owing to its larger size, but Denver reached to the connecting rope (that sailors call the painter) and pulled it taut. It slackened again, and, slipping from the pully it passed through, fell with a splash into the waves; and the frail boat, fifty feet from the Black Swan, floated out of the shadow it had lain concealed in, and clear of the suffocating smoke into the full glare of the flames.

It could now be seen how completely the ship was mastered by the fire, which burned in fitful convulsive bursts and movements from the centre right down to the forecastle. It was a terrible peril to have escaped from, and as this man in the boat looked up, hardly able to realize and grasp its significance, he saw two black *silhouettes* looming large through the smoke which enveloped the quarter-deck; they were the two sailors who had saved them. They were lost!

When these two luckless men found the boat gone, they seemed to rush to the other side of the deck, as though they might have mistaken where it was left; then they returned and saw where the boat really was, and commenced gesticulating wildly and shouting in a way that reached Denver's ears even through the fearful noise and rush of the spreading conflagration.

He shouted back to them to jump and swim, but could get no reply; then gathering the dripping fifty feet of rope up into a coil, he flung it to them with practised hand as he would have lassoed a refractory horse, but it fell short into the sea. All this while the ship was receding

still further from them, and the insupportable vapour of the fire had been growing more dense over the stern, and now it closed down entirely, and hid these two despairing wretches from sight. Nothing could be known of what became of them after.

As I have said the whole of the front part of the ship was burning; in some places the fire had eaten three or four feet down the sides, and the flames from the high fore-castle were sometimes towering twenty feet above the reach of the rest. It was singular to watch these great flames shooting up spirally, and twisting like serpents about to spring. The rigging of the foremast was all destroyed, but the great spar still stood with the yards fallen from it, while the fire raged round its foot, and the enormous flames were constantly shooting up, twining and entangling themselves round it. Suddenly it swerved almost imperceptibly, then noiselessly it gave way at the base, and with a loud and startling crash fell by the board, countless fragments of burning rigging and rope dangling from it, and so into the sea on the opposite side of the ship, while showers after showers of its brilliantly flaming splinters flashed up and were driven off in the wind again.

The ship indeed seemed fraught with the very elements of hell. Up till now the stern had appeared intact as far as the fire was concerned, but now through the stifling mist which had enveloped it down to the water-line, the four side windows of the cabin could be seen alight and flaming, then they burst one after another with the heat, and long tongues of fire shot through flaming almost as steadily as jets of gas for a while, and again vomiting the black smoke. The sleeping compartments right in the

stern had soon caught, and the dry wood of their partitions burned like tinder; then the skylight near the wheel cracked and shivered in fragments, and the red flame rose steadily through it, turning the smoke lurid and dun-coloured and firing the deck-edges it shot through.

Thus in an incredibly short space of time the fire had spread from end to end of the ship, and what fate had befallen the men, whether they had been suffocated in the smoke, or had jumped over into the sea and been drowned unable to swim, neither Denver nor probably any other human being would be ever able to say. One sight remained for Denver, however, which made him start to his feet with an irrepressible exclamation of horror. He had been looking at the vessel end on from the stern, but now she began to veer round in the wind, and the great projecting spar of the bowsprit appeared starting out from the blazing forecastle, and on it *were clinging five human beings*—looking strangely dwarfed by the vast extent of fire and luminous smoke which swirled over their heads. They clung in the chains desperately and tenaciously, and the ape mentioned before was crouching at the further end of the spar, but from the way they all seemed to be endeavouring to protect their faces and hands, the heat must have been scorching them. One of them caught sight of the boat, and then they all began to wave their arms and apparently to shout to him, but their cries were drowned. It was impossible to get to them. he had no oars, and he cast his eyes despairingly round the boat they were adrift in. Dorothy was sitting motionless and speechless in the stern; just as Denver saw her face she appeared to catch sight of the men on the bowsprit, and such a wild expres-

sion appeared on her features, succeeded by a forced look of indifference, that for the moment he thought she must have gone mad—then he turned again to examine the terrible scene of human agony on the bowsprit, and by an irresistible impulse cast his coat off, as if he meant to jump over and swim to them. A single glance which he took at Laura's face sufficed to paralyse his will. His heart was as brave as a panther's, but where conflicting impulses meet, the strong ones disable the weak, and his love was more powerfully predominant with him at that moment than his humanity, and he shuddered as he thought of being drowned and leaving Laura alone in the boat with his wife. Again he was forced to turn his face to the ship, and his heart started within him as a great tongue of flame flared out, swerving over the spar so as to envelope the men on it in a fiery embrace. Then for a moment it withdrew: but one man had fallen, sucked down under the water without disturbing its surface, and still the others hung in the chains. Through some aperture the flames sprang out now under the bowsprit hardly two feet above the water-line, while blown down by the increasing wind the fire and smoke swooped over, entirely hiding the spar, and what the men on it did it was impossible to know. Had it lasted a moment longer Denver's irresolution would have passed, and he would infallibly have jumped into the water; but when the spar thrust itself again, as it were, out through the luminous smoke, it was bare and the chains underneath were empty.

The fire was now at its brightest, its glow seemed to fall from horizon to horizon, and to light up the very clouds above it, and it was now strange to watch the albatross,

which, as I have described, was at first so high overhead, but now wheeling nearer and nearer to the ship. The bird made longer and wilder circles, as if wishing all the while to escape, but always coming nearer again to the heat, flapping its long wings wildly, and swerving from right to left in its fright, until at last it was scarcely fifty feet above the flames. Finally with a wild but unheard shriek, it approached so close that the feathers of its long wings seemed to shrivel up, and it fell helplessly and headlong into the lurid smoke.

Thus at last of all the living beings, human or animal, which had existed between the horizons of this desolate ocean, only these three people were left living and unseparated. It was as if the ties of passion, the hatred and love which entangled them mentally, had physically held them together, and with the safety of one, the lives of the two others were assured. The Black Swan still blazed, but it must not be supposed that the glow from its fire lighted everything equally, for the swirling smoke-wreaths intercepted the light constantly, projecting great black flaring shadows for hundreds of yards over the surface of the waves, the heavens above being black as ink and impenetrably amalgamated with the verge of the sea at the horizon; only at intervals, a few glittering stars were seen as the openings in the cloud-rack drifted by. In the direction where the smoke was carried off by the wind an elongated trail of luminosity swept, gradually lessening through the darkness. Altogether it was a spectacle with nothing of mediocrity in it, everything visible being brought out by the preternaturally wild light of the conflagration, or hidden in the still wilder shadows of the opposing night

and from a great height, in proportion to all this awful vacuity of space and blackness, the flaring and burning of the deserted ship might have appeared little more than the dim light shed by some glow-worm in a dark plain, while the boat containing the three in whose fate this story is concerned, seemed but a dim speck lost in a circle of lurid radiance and tossed at will by the invisible wind: and yet what human utterance can sufficiently describe the rapture in Denver's heart, as Laura gradually began to come back to consciousness? With his eyes blinded and his brain lost to all that was going on round them, he was supporting her head, chafing her soft hands and sprinkling the salt water on her forehead, when her arms and shoulders moved convulsively, though slightly, the clenched eyelids half opened, and her lips moved, muttering faintly something he could not hear at first—then more distinctly,

“Water, water, give me some water: my throat's parched.”

Till that instant no thought of want had entered his mind, everything had been forgotten: but the word “water” made his blood recoil on his heart. They had none—and he remembered *now* in his despair how he had heard the men calling out to him about the barrel, and how he had neglected it. He had endured thirst before in his life, and knew but too well what it was, and a terrible train of probabilities rushed through his mind, all in that one instant, as he dashed up his hand against his forehead with an action which had all the wildness of desperation in it.

Dorothy had turned her face to them with a fierce gleam in her eyes, unwomanly and fearful to behold. Again

Laura repeated her demand faintly. He bent down over her and said firmly, yet in a voice so strangely altered that it seemed not to come from his own lips,—

“We have no water. We’re adrift in the open boat; adrift on the sea,—you, Dorothy, and I; and unless we’re soon found and picked up,—may God be merciful to us!”

As he spoke lifting her up in his arms, he pointed across the half-mile of sea, which gleamed brightly with reflections from the fire, still burning and flaring but so low down now, that it seemed in places to be springing from the very waves. Even at present its warmth fell in their faces like August sunshine. He felt Laura shudder as he supported her, then her consciousness began more fully to return and she muttered faintly,

“I remember now, Denver, I fainted when I thought you’d been burnt or injured. There was a great flash of fire in my eyes and I could see nothing: but I don’t want to drink now. Oh it’s terrible to look at!” she said as a full burst of the red flame broke out, lighting the waves round their boat more luridly than ever.

In reality her throat was parched if she would only have admitted it; but with her quick womanly perception, her denial was merely following out the instinctive wish not to give pain to him in whose keeping she had entrusted her most secret heart, and even now she knew by the tone of his voice, and the expression of his features, that she had put him in an agony by her half-conscious request. Not having seen all that had passed, she could not understand all that was in his mind, and could not know the keen pang he winced under as she lifted her face

and pressed her soft lips with trembling fondness to his rough bearded chin, saying again,

"It's not your fault, love, that we've been driven out here. We're still together. Don't look in that way, —it pains me more to see you in pain than to be so myself."

The man pressed her figure to his breast, and his eyes lightened, and the moustaches which concealed his lips parted with a kind of ghastly smile in answer to hers, but he kissed her only and said nothing: a strange and memorable sight it would have been for any one who could have watched them thus by the light of the fire, and yet a stranger thing would be a world formed without love!

Laura turning her face suddenly from her lover's passionate gaze, uttered an involuntary exclamation, for there was the figure of another woman in the stern of the boat,—a solitary muffled figure in a long red cloak, with face entirely hidden. There was something suggested by the attitude, which made the absence of any features in the covered countenance (despite the form of the nose and forehead faintly visible) more terrible to be imagined than any actual face. Her attitude might have served as a model for I know not what statue of passion or madness, as she thus crouched with her elbows on her knees, her face low down between her hands and pressed into the folds of the shawl. It was as though she could not bear to look upon something near her, and yet as though her hidden eyes still saw it, causing her to shrink from it in imagination.

It was Dorothy her lover's wife; Laura's first impulse

was to withdraw herself away from him, and she half rose on her knees, although the wife could not see her, and seemed to be disregarding her presence. I think it turned her blanched face even paler, as she noted the gleaming expression in Denver's eyes, as *he* also glanced in Dorothy's direction. She knew the character of the man she loved too well, to mistake any sign of his features, and a sickness seized her heart, whenever these two met, face to face; and yet the lovers drew together again, and it seemed almost as if Denver were trying to hide and shut out from Laura all that was passing around them; such a persistent time did he spend kissing and pressing his lips on her eyelids.

Presently they were once more attracted by a greater crashing and hissing than any before. The Black Swan by this time might have been half a mile away; in some places the fire had burned down to the water's edge and the great black side timbers projected upwards, from the back-bone of the ship, as it were, and into the flames, like the charred ribs of some skeleton when the flesh has been burnt away. Two or three blackened and shattered spars, one with its cross-trees still intact, were all that remained of the great fore-castle. The sudden crash and hissing had been caused by the fall of the main-mast clean by the board, and by the volumes of bright sparks which fell into the sea in consequence. The decks themselves were eaten through and destroyed, save for two or three of the heaviest rafters still reaching from side to side of the timbers I have before described as looking like human ribs, and the whole of the once stately vessel was fast dwindling to a mastless and emptied hulk.

This shattered, fire-spirting, hissing mass of blackened timbers, tossing hither and thither on the waves, was once the place in which the whole principle of their lives had been changed, and now well-nigh incredible it seemed as they looked on the fragments of what had once been a powerful emigrant vessel, to which the hopes and lives and destinies of multitudinous men women and children had been confided.

There is, perhaps, nothing in nature more strange to reflect on, than this magic transmutation by fire which we witness daily with so little thought or comment. To see a substantial object take light and vanish away in flame before our very eyes, not dying invisibly as our souls or lives do, but simply vanishing from sight, while only an utterly disproportionate sediment of its ashes remains behind, is miraculous, but never was this perplexing problem brought more thoroughly before the human mind, than at present with these two people.

Alas ! what could these ill-fated lovers do but sit helplessly clasped in each other's arms ? now left dependent on themselves ; all human or earthly aid apparently withdrawn from them. But for a man like Denver, it was impossible to remain long in utter despair ; it was incredible to him that they could be left to drift to death through the desolate ocean without food or succour, it was *incredible*. Rain would fall from the clouds above them,—they would be picked up by some ship, or would reach land somewhere : all these hopes he whispered hurriedly to Laura in the light of the now receding fire, for though far off, it was plain that the fitful flames were lessened in violence, probably from pure lack of attainable fuel, and the glare, save

for a few struggling fits and starts which at odd moments it would resume, was growing less bright minute by minute.

Now Denver looking searchingly into the deepening shadows round the boat, saw to his surprise, two or three great splashes of phosphorus struck from the waves here and there—one big drop fell on his forehead, and a slight pattering shower began all round. It was rain!

He started up with an indescribable feeling of relief, and began hastily considering the best way to collect it when it should pelt down as he knew it presently would, for the first drops were large and violent, as if presaging a storm; but his heart sank as suddenly again in disappointment, for there was not a single utensil capable of holding water in the boat.

All he could do would be to spread out their clothes on the planks in the bottom, and wait till they were sopping: it would be only a temporary supply, but he had no time to think of that. His own jacket lay where he had cast it down, it was caught up and spread out flat, then he pulled Laura's cloak off her, doubled it fourfold and placed that also. His figure could be seen hastily at work by the decreasing light of the fire. Next his waistcoat out of which something fell clinking was taken off and placed in the bottom near the rest, and after this was done he turned to Laura, who had been watching him mutely, hardly understanding what he was about. His eyes gleamed with excitement as he put his arm round her neck and said quickly, "You shall have some water, my darling, if you'll only wait awhile, but I don't know how to get much of it

in this damned place; if we were on land it would be different. I wish to God it would lighten," he went on turning round to look at the remains of the fire-destroyed ship. "The rain's left off, but it'll begin again I know, by the dampness of the wind. If the fire goes out there'll be no light to see what we're about—I wish to hell it would rain now! Why I believe the ship is sinking. Good God! Laura, look at the steam—everything's against us!"

CHAPTER VI.

Just as he spoke a dreadful hissing and spluttering became audible, or rather burst on their ears, swelling up into a hideous sound like the distant muttering of thunder. There was one last glare of flame, an almost instantaneous flash which permitted them to see a vast rolling volume of steam for an instant. It was the water which appeared to be penetrating into the sinking hull and to be quelling the fire as it reached it; then suddenly the darkness fell all around them, for the remains of the burning ship were sucked down and stifled under the waves.

Two or three sparks were left for a while travelling about overhead, and then died out in the gloom. The vortex created over where the Black Swan had gone down, gleamed and flashed with phosphor-fire, reflected dimly on a few dissolving wreaths of hot steam left whirling over it: but soon the darkness settled again, and everything connecting the boat and its occupants with the lost ship, was blotted out in the night.

Laura had shut her eyes and turned her head away, as if fearing to look upon this last episode in the destruction of their safety, only she crouched closer to Denver's side on the bench where they sat. The eyes, dazzled as they must have been by the sudden change, would have made but slight difference to her open or shut in the sudden intense

blackness they were floating adrift in. The simultaneous loneliness and silence, unbroken by any noise or light whatever, was awful to listen to, or look into. Denver also sat speechless and motionless with his arm still clasping and caressing her neck. For awhile they both kept the most complete silence, as if utterly overwhelmed with the beginning of the end of the catastrophe. At length she opened her eyes and looked round timorously into the darkness, just as the stillness and gloom were both at once disturbed by a heavy plunge of the boat. A gleaming circle of phosphorescent ripples showed all round the prow, faintly lighting up Denver's face for an instant in strange contrast to the wild glow their faces had been in only one minute before, while Dorothy's form showed at the end outlined dimly against the faint glimmer.

Denver feeling perhaps the girl tremble against him, took her hand in his as if to reassure her, but still he said nothing, and seemed as if waiting with breathless impatience for something important to happen. She looked in his face, but though touching her own she could not see it, and then as it were instinctively she passed her hand over his features, to *feel* his expression as if she were blind.

Meanwhile a peculiar hissing and murmuring began to steal softly to her ears, almost inaudible at first, but intensifying by degrees until once more they began to feel the heavy drops of the rain falling splash, splash after splash, in both of their faces, all over the boat and into the sea around them.

This was what Denver had been waiting so silently for: and now a most unusual and singular phenomenon appeared, a wildly poetical paradox among phenomena such as Nature

sometimes mocks our perceptions with, for the waves of the sea caught fire and were lit up by the wet incessant pelting of the shower, and the white water-flames spreading from confine to confine seemed at first as though they would have consumed the frail black boat which drifted in their midst. The whole surface of the water, as far as could be seen through the blind pelting of the rain, was covered with circles and flashes of bright flaming phosphorus; and the storm still increasing, it began to dart up in showers from the waves in all directions and soon was lashed into seemingly incredible fury.

It was as if the sea in its wildly tempestuous triumph and mockery were mimicking the fire it had quenched with a display of its own mock-fire, and Laura's fear-filled eyes, soon tired by the tumultuous and infinite shiftings and dancings of the weirdly livid flame-showers, almost began to convert the different shapes taken by the impetuous outbursts of the ghastly luminosity, into forms of fiends or demons, thus revelling in their ungodly glee, over the ruin and desolation they had achieved.

The countless lines of the rain itself, the causer of all this strange disturbance, pelting everywhere into the blind darkness, were compelled to reflect the vivid sea illumination high up into the gloom they emerged from, and a soft delicate trembling of light was emitted everywhere.

At the stern-end of the boat Dorothy could again be seen dimly, crouching over as she had been from the first, save that the cloak which she had pulled over her face, as if to avoid the sight of the men on the bowsprit of the burning ship, was fallen off and the luminous rain was

pelting on her shoulders and dripping off the loosened locks of her hair.

In a while everything in the boat was drenched through; Laura's cloak lay in the bottom, where Denver was collecting the rain in its folds, and her uncovered hair was sodden and streaming with the wet, though strange to say and as if by some occult sympathy with the flame of the sea, its dripping tangles were filled with electric sparks and it crackled as if it were burning. The soft wet peculiar smell of the fresh rain tantalised her thirst, and unable to wait for Denver, she was putting the locks one by one to her lips as if she were sucking them for the moisture they contained, as she mutely watched where he was bending over in the middle of the boat. He had left her side and was groping about on his hands and knees, spreading out the cloth to catch as much of the rain-shower, while it lasted, as he could. This time he was resolved that nothing should escape them, in their precarious position, merely through *his* negligence, and he worked with trembling diligence; but even now, it having scarcely lasted three minutes, the turbulent rain began to beat less violently and then fail, till at length it ceased almost as suddenly as it had begun, and the lashed surface of the sea calmed down again, though it was still suffused in places by detached sheets of its own luminosity.

All this scene that I have described as taking place in the boat, was lit up by the weird lights and tremulous reflections that came from the water, but now that those were gone, all became dark again. Denver intent as he had been on his occupation, had now got what he wanted for the time, the shawl was drenched through and dripping,

and this he brought to Laura, making her hold her head back while he tried to squeeze some of it into her mouth.

The greater part of this precious liquid was, as might be imagined, wasted over her face and throat, but he managed in some degree to quench her thirst, and then he tried to squeeze some into his own dry lips. No idea ever came into his head of attending to his wife, he knew she could collect the water for herself quite as well as they did, if she chose ; but so it was that Dorothy got none of it.

The shawl was at length wrung dry and Denver let it drop ; they were safe from thirst, but only for a few short hours and both knew that well ; as to any thought of saving water it was out of the question. He sat down wringing his wet hands dry, before he could touch Laura with them, while she was wringing the remnants of the wet out of her damp hair, which still emitted the sparks of electricity. It would be difficult to define the complication of thoughts and feelings that possessed them both, in a position so utterly unexpected and strange to them. It was not despair, though it might have been akin to it, and it certainly was not hope. Everything had come about in so short a time, while events were passing, that little room for thought had been left. Denver had done all that he was capable of, simply from necessity at the moment, but now that they were left with time to consider what to do, neither of them could tell. Utterly strange to the sea, Denver was well-nigh as helpless as Laura herself.

They sat together with their clothes wet through, not indeed that this was much thought of, Australian-bred as

they both were: for strange though it may appear to us, it would perhaps never have occurred to them to seek shelter from such a slight shower as this had been. They were composed, but neither seemed to like to utter the thoughts and doubts that oppressed them. Terrible stories they had heard long since concerning the survivors of shipwrecks, floated, half realised, through their minds; and neither cared to speak of them to the other. It was a dire combination of doubt and uncertainty that they struggled in, and their mutual love, perhaps, made it all the more terrible; their existences had as it were, been suddenly from a disquieting dream, merged into a terrible reality.

The fickle wind had fallen away once more, though such clouds as had not dissolved into the rainfall had been driven off from the sky, so that the depths of the heavens were jewelled all over with piercingly brilliant stars. The atmosphere above, seemed first as though spread with a web of luminosity, but it being now close upon two o'clock, it was the quarter-moon about to rise, and a faint haze of light preceding its appearance was mingling with the night over the western horizon, and spreading gradually up to the deep zenith. The face of the calm sea was utterly dark and lost, so that the boat, save for the traces of phosphorus emitted round it, was unseen. Denver and Laura sitting together, had both begun to talk in a low voice, as if they feared Dorothy would overhear them. Laura listening with terror as he narrated how he had first seen the fire, and how the men lost their senses: all this she remembered dimly herself, but knew nothing of what followed, of how he had leapt off the burning ship with her in his arms, and how the men were left behind. As he spoke she could tell

plainly by the tone of his voice, how utterly overcome he was by the dreadful position they were in, although more no doubt on her account, than his own, and come what might, she resolved to die, rather than utter one word of complaint to him. A terrible gloom had succeeded the light halo of forgetfulness which their mutual love had cast around them, and yet their passion only seemed to burn more brightly in contrast with it, as they sat clasped side by side on the boat-bench, out on the lonely sea: and thus, neither of them caring to move or think, they sat silent for a while; till it was evident that Laura was quite worn out, and gradually, in spite of everything, her head sank against her lover's breast, and she ceased replying to him, her breathing grew more regular and prolonged, and at length he sat with his arms round her, knowing that she was asleep, and hardly daring to draw a full breath, lest the motion of his chest should disturb her. If she had seemed something to worship and wonder at while waking and moving, how sacred must she have appeared now fallen asleep for the first time in his arms!

The warmth of their bodies, aided by the sultry atmosphere, had by this time nearly dried their clothes, and the boat was fast drying too, and both were lost in the stillness of night.

The dreaming sweetness of the smile on Laura's face was unseen by Denver—she was sleeping and utterly unconscious of all that was around her.

It was impossible for a man of Denver's temperament to give way to utter despair without knowing why, and he had no real knowledge of what their position might turn to ultimately, or how they were to exist for long. It is a

terrible thing waiting to learn whether despair or hope must prevail, and Laura was as a weight which dragged him down continually, he dared not think what might become of her, and what she, so physically weak, might have to undergo; he remembered his own sufferings from thirst now long ago, and his heart turned sick within him as he looked forward to what three or four days might bring them to. There was no chance for them on which he dared to calculate sanguinely: he indeed had heard the men in the *Black Swan* talking of a colonial vessel they expected to cross, and a glow of hope rose within him for a moment, but only to sink to a deeper despondency as he thought how slight the chance was of their meeting, or how likely that they might pass each other in the night unnoticed. How he longed for something to make a signal with (knowing all the while that the boat was utterly empty) or at least for the dark night to clear away, that he might see what he was about!

It is clear that no physical suffering could have broken this man's spirit, but only an intense mental strain: the body is slow to act on the mind, however swift the mind may be to paralyse the body. Thus thrown without warning amid so strange a complication of bodily trouble, and mental bewilderment, he required all the strength of his will to keep himself in courage, and thus a wild alternation of sanguine hope, and bitter despondency, beset him all that night; though I think the tendency of his character was to discard hope.

But through all these fluctuations, his intense love for Laura was still uppermost (like the unchanging key-melody in one of Wagner's most wonderful storms of

music), giving him ever greater pain, and ever mixing up her one image with endless plans of escape, or pictures of destruction; till sitting in the boat pondering over these dreadful eventualities, her placid and regular breathing always in his ears, began strangely to beat time with his own thoughts, and gradually a benumbing drowsiness stole over his brain, giving strange aspects to the evolutions of his mind. And once again he roused himself from thinking of Dorothy as she sat at the other end of the boat, and of the fate that bound them, with some of the old unreasoning headstrong resentment—despite the dread circumstances they were in: for Nature holds in her hands a wonderful and faultless chain of types and sequences; and one deep magnetic current of passion of hatred and love, from which all sensation springs, pervades all things equally, whether displayed in the dumb tumult of wind, rain, sunshine—of the clouds and the sea which travel with the tempest, or displayed in that which is Nature's highest expression, the inner consciousness of the human mind.

Before the drifting of this magnetized passion-storm all resisting influences must perish. Instinct is the lode-star of humanity, by following which, man is brought to a certain point of civilization: then, alas! comes self-consciousness, and resistance to everything not accepted by his own reason, and so much gain perishes and falls to dust; for reason as a mirror which too often images straight and fair things crookedly, creates falsity, and wrongful instinct in the impossibility of the attainment of its desire, creates despair, and despair is death to the creative faculty. Then out of the disorder and ruin of the

relapsed night, the weary task begins again of evolving the good from the bad. How many separate criteria of right and wrong have risen and passed utterly away, let history attest; but surely the nature which creates man, knows best how to nurture him. To her the individual has no existence, and though men say truly that each of them is capable of experiencing individually every sensation which may exist, yet in reality the individual is only able to give expression to one side of his nature at once, and one man is like a drop of water taken from the ocean.

Thus far I claim that Denver and Laura, in loving each other, merely broke the false laws of humanity, obeying those which nature originally intended them for, although, being but units, they trembled at the fulfilment of the blind instinct which led them on—for what was to explain and show them the wrongfulness of the human law they had transgressed?

They themselves thought they had done wrong and were guilty, and Laura's sense of this was expressed in her fear and trembling whenever her lover was out of her sight—his, in passionate resistance to any self-suggested remonstrance and in blind hatred of his wife who reminded him of what he had done. Added to this I know not what nameless suspicion seemed now to enthrall—almost to stupefy him—but Dorothy kept herself quiet in the stern of the boat and gave no token of her presence.

Laura's breathing always came regularly, and listening so long to the sound which was so sweet to him, he grew at length tired out with unproductive thinking and planning,—tired out in body and brain and thought, till he

almost began to slumber himself. Indeed it was no use keeping awake, always turning over and re-examining vain conjectures as to what fate had in store for them, and feeling the terrible uncertainty I have spoken of, in not knowing whether to hope or to despair, all he could do would be to endeavour to keep off such tangible peril as really did present itself. He knew that he required sleep now to enable him to begin the next day with sufficient energy and courage. He had been reflecting how he could fish, and thus save them all for awhile, and had arranged a plan to carry this out by the daylight; and a warm glow of hope seemed rising over the horizon of his mind.

His tired head sank lower and lower till at last he roused himself with an effort, and lifted Laura's unconscious form into the bottom of the boat, and still leaving his arm round her neck to serve as a pillow, lay down beside her. Her thin hands still clung lightly round him and her sleeping face fell against his own; and so in the deep night, on the dark face of the ocean, swaying gently on its waves, these two fell asleep, together for the first time in their lives:—and the glittering stars looked down into the darkness.

Denver's sleep was dreamless, yet he was always conscious of some kind of oppression weighing him down, as there always is with a man who slumbers between the pauses of difficulty and trouble which beset him. There is nothing sadder than to wake up from this condition, and lie awake striving vainly to recall the causes of the depression and sorrow which hang over the spirit, until suddenly the reason dawns on the remembrance, enlarged and

intensified by the effect of dim twilight in which the mind then is.

Denver experienced this saddening sensation before a full hour was passed, and lay in a state of semi-consciousness, looking up at the starry heavens, now turned faint and pallid by the risen moon. Hearing the usual sleepy wash of the water, he could half have believed himself on board the destroyed ship again, and indeed this was his first impression. Laura was sleeping in his arms, and her face was leaning on his, and a lock of her hair was fallen across his forehead. Then he lifted his head slightly and saw Dorothy's figure dimly discernible in the night, still sitting by the stern. Her body was all dark, but her unveiled face formed a blanched spot lighter than the half-luminous sky beyond, and through the black hair which fell over on one side of her shoulders a dim star shone like an emerald.

For any one not in Denver's position, this might have formed a scene full of strange interest and weirdly beautiful night phantasy, but at the sight of Dorothy a terrible half-awakened exaggeration of the destruction of the Black Swan swept through all his nerves, and the full knowledge of the position a few short hours had served to reduce them to, rushed over his mind, like a tempest over a calm sea, dispelling the shadows and delusions of his brain with a sudden burst of terror such as all men feel on awakening from the slumber they have begun at night, with hearts over-confident for the morrow's trouble. I think an awakened sleeper always sees his last thoughts in a kind of inversion. Beyond this however he made no sign, but lay still with his heart beating violently, sick with per-

plexity and knowing not what to do. But soon, once more, his natural weariness asserted itself, and lulled by the soft soothing of the waves, he fell to sleep again, and this time utterly and dreamlessly.

In the meantime, casting its shadow through space, the great earth spun swiftly on its course in the eternal flood of sunlight it revolves through, and on the surface which came nearest the sun, the night and the glimmering moonlight began slowly to give way before the dawn. Gradually a kind of pale reflection of daylight diffused itself over the sea, and where the conflicting waves splashed, their tropical flame became hardly visible: only the bubbles of foam created here and there, looked white and brilliant even to weirdness, contrasted with the grey extent of water they were sprung from. The deep dark colour where the sides and hollows of the restless waves reflected the sky above, gave a quite immeasurable idea of the depth of the ocean on which the old-fashioned boat could be seen dimly adrift. Everywhere this pale and colourless ocean extended, dark in the centre and towards the north-west, where even now the verge of the horizon could be scarcely distinguished from the sky, while towards the south-east the sky was brightening perceptibly with a faint resplendence of pallid light. The clouds as I have said were all blown off in the wind or dissolved into the late rainfall, and round the cleared zenith the heavens were heavy with night and shadow; here the clustering stars still shone resplendent, but growing less bright as they neared the greyness of the coming dawn, and the dim quarter-circle of the moon grew more vaporous than ever as it still rose over the southern sky.

Beyond these faint indications there were still no absolute signs of the coming of the sun, save always that the same increasing paleness now began gradually to detach such objects as were to be seen, out of the oblivion the night had plunged them into; and that the defined circle of dark in the upper sky perceptibly receded. For more than an hour the light in the east had gone on concentrating, until without any previous warning a profuse irradiation and flush of yellow effulgence was emitted over the horizon, spreading all over the heavens to the very zenith, changing everything; while an intensely brilliant point of light from whence all this radiation proceeded, shone out over the confines of the palpitating waves like a touch of fire, lighting up the ocean simultaneously from glittering crest to crest in a long line towards the desolate boat. Only one figure, that of Dorothy, was visible in it, looking at the sunrise which glowed on her pale face, and shading her eyes with her arm.

Strange was it to note this lonely boat abroad on the waters with just this one figure visible, cut off from all human help and so utterly dependent on the wild play of the elements, but if not stranger, yet more terrible, was it to note the way she turned, watching the faces of the two sleepers in the bottom.

The wild light of sunrise went on increasing, a red globe of glowing fire was now half detached from the dim verge of the horizon, and soon it had consumed the last lingering evidence of night. The sea was turned to a deep blue, and the pale sky, harmonizing with it, was inexpressibly lovely in its different cadences and modulations of tone and colour.

Soon, still hanging low above the waves, the full disk of the sun, glittering in its blinding effulgence, shone over everything, and in half an hour more its light fell slantingly over the gunwale of the boat. It gleamed on Denver's face and reached his pupils through his shut lids. He awoke and separating himself from Laura's arm without awakening her, he got up on his feet, looking round on the dreary scene. So the longed-for day broke over the salt waves of the glistening ocean.

THE BLACK SWAN.

CHAPTER VII.

LAURA still seemed to sleep, and he did not wake her, but after standing awhile examining the sky and the sea, he bent down and picked up the cast-off cloak which had lain disused during the warmth of the night, and began searching its plaits and folds carefully as if with some set purpose. It was quite dry now and stiffened with the salt which had got into it from the atmosphere. Then he felt in his pockets for his knife, but it was gone, and he began picking the thread out as well as he could with his fingers, and teeth, and in this way by knotting, and plaiting fragments together, he made shift to get four or five yards of strong pack-thread.

This was to form a fishing line. Once while his work was going on, he bent over the side of the boat peering down into the depths of the blue water beneath, but he could see nothing there: the morning sea was as clear as crystal, and his sight plunged deeper and deeper into the weltering flood, till all became hazy and he could see no further. The line was made fast to one of the pegs that the oars move in, and then he began to look about him; a hook must be made. He noticed some object glittering in the folds of the shawl, and leaning down to it he found a small silver brooch with a strong pin to it. This he plucked out and fashioned with his teeth, until it was bent

into the form required and then it was made fast at the end of the line.

In the meantime so intent was he on this work that he had not noticed that Laura Conway was awake; she was roused by his movements, for every step he made caused the boat to quiver from stern to prow, as it hung suspended on the clear waves. He was just trying to think what he should bait the hook's point with, when he looked up and saw her just rising in a bewildered manner as if she did not at first know where she was—then she saw Dorothy half lying and half sitting in the stern. There was a kind of empty doorless locker, the top of which formed a bench that her face and head lay on supported by her left arm, the other hung down passively, the fingers twitching at intervals; the rest of her body was on the planks, and she was just high enough to look over the low gunwale.

The girl's face resumed the paleness which seemed habitual to it now, as she came and sat down by her lover on one of the thwarts in the boat: she still however watched Dorothy, as though unable to take her eyes off her. Denver all the while looking about him, could think of nothing better for a bait than to tear pieces off his woollen shirt-sleeve and to prick his arm, so as to soak them in blood: this he did with the sharp hook, so that a few drops of the red liquid fell on each, staining them through. It must be remembered that sea-fish will bite almost at the bare hook itself, and that the lure he had provided for them ought to have sufficed to attract swarms from the water around.

Fastening the rag on he next dropped the line over the

side, but it only floated there, and he had to pull it back and fasten the broken brooch on above it before it would sink.

Then with his finger trembling on the line, his heart beating with anxiety while he waited the result, he turned round to Laura. She was still gazing half in amazement and half in fear at Dorothy, but she that was looked at neither moved nor looked back, only her dark eyes gazed vacantly with a kind of half-smothered fire in them, out across the glittering waves, and her lips moved occasionally, but without sound coming from them. It seemed indeed as if her own frantic words had come true, and that the events she had passed through, really *had* reduced her to insanity.

There seemed something in her presence, which always acted like a spell over poor Laura whenever they met, just as the wild singing ceases through the woods and all is hushed, because a hawk sweeps overhead in decreasing circles; yet it seemed as if fate were never tired of bringing these two nearer and more in literal contact with each other, every day of their lives. But Dorothy took no notice of her, and seeing this she began to regain confidence; feeling besides that Denver's strength of will was so near to protect her, she at last threw off all restraint; at least all such I mean as was not self-imposed by her own natural modesty and bashfulness; though I believe if the wife had once looked her in the eyes for a few moments, the same influence would have been resumed. She however, far from being able to look them in the eyes, seemed hardly able to bear being looked at herself; some strange instinct seemed to tell her whenever her husband's

face was turned in her direction, and even if he were not looking at her, she seemed as ill at ease as some wild animal. Once or twice an involuntary impulse had caused him to turn round to her as if fascinated and with a kind of unyielding repugnance in his face, but otherwise he seemed to accept her presence passively, as a kind of fate, that must be dumbly endured without reasoning or resistance.

As I have said, Laura timidly at first, but with gathering confidence as she observed Dorothy's lassitude and apathy, began to talk with Denver, and allow him to caress her and wind the fond fingers of his free hand through the ripples of her hair, yet God knows it seemed to neither of them a time for triviality:—they both knew well that their lives hung upon a straining cord; literally upon the line Denver was fishing with, and despite the mutual love which at times asserted itself, transmuting everything in their faces and voices into its own shape and tone, despite this, neither could hide from the other the trouble and anxiety on their minds.

Nearly a full hour must have passed and Denver had made with Laura's assistance another line, getting the necessary thread from the skirt of her dress, and making the hook from a hair-pin. Laura held it, and so they waited a longer while yet, neither of them speaking and still without success. Suddenly (not having seen how her hook was baited and perhaps wishing to recall his mind from the gloom his face must have shown it was harbouring) she asked him what they had at the ends of the lines.

"A rag stained with blood," he replied.

"*Your own blood!*" she exclaimed looking at him with such intense fear that he almost smiled in despite of the sickening anxiety that was increasing in his heart, but he only made a motion with his head in reply.

Twenty or thirty minutes more passed, he with one line, she with the other, and both silent until again Laura spoke.

"There's nothing on my line, Denver: has nothing touched yours?"

"Nothing."

After a while she again spoke to him.

"Put some of my blood on the hooks, perhaps it may attract them more than yours, Gabriel."

There was something almost ludicrous in the feminine simplicity and confidence with which she spoke, and in the way she bared one of her beautiful arms, and held it out to him, but in the place in which they were uttered, there was a significance in them and in her action which made them terrible. As to Denver, he merely smiled in her face, half bitterly, half tenderly, and then the lines of his countenance relapsed into their somewhat more than serious expression, while he took her outstretched hand in his own, pressing it at intervals with his fingers, and went on silently and intently watching the water in which the line drifted. She noticed that his hand trembled at times, and there was something so strangely anxious added to the habitual earnestness of his features, that she hardly dared to take her eyes off as they sat together.

He was thinking over the preceding day's excitement and terror which had thus rendered them castaways, and I know not what it was that caused him to look up suddenly

at Dorothy in one of those impulses before described ; but Laura's face and eyes assumed a look of terror at the fierce expression shown in his, for as I have said, she dreaded him to meet Dorothy's eyes, even more than she herself did, and she laid her hand anxiously on his arm, as if to try and distract, and break up his reverie. The reality of their position was growing on them.

It must now, by the sun's position, have been near noon, an almost imperceptible breeze blew over the surface of the sea in slight wave-ruffling gusts, and only served slightly to atone for the flame-heat on their bare heads and lightly clad bodies, but it brought no cloud with it. The sky was utterly denuded and empty, save for a faint white speck just touching the waves where the moon was sinking, and the paleness at dawn was now changed to colour as deep and brilliant as the manifold tones of the ocean beneath : not the slightest hint of the morning grey-ness remained. The waves themselves seemed palpitating with the heat, and whenever the boat plunged slightly as it did now and then, a slight dash of lukewarm spray was cast in their faces.

Now that the full noontide glare showed the vast proportions of the water and firmament, the boat with those in it, Dorothy lying or leaning in the stern, Denver with his careworn features, and the other girl with her beautiful face and golden hair flaming red in the sun, looked fearfully diminished and lonely ; while to Denver and Laura the imprisoning walls of the blue horizon and the still bluer sky became perfectly awful, in their unbroken monotony, and a soul-benumbing sensation of utter helplessness gained on them as the tedious day wore on.

They were absolutely without anything in the boat save their clothes. Denver's watch, his knife, and his telescope, things that he invariably had with him, were all left behind in the cabin of the destroyed ship, only out of one of his pockets, nearly twenty guinea pieces and some old Spanish pieces of eight still in circulation, had fallen and lay unheeded and valueless in the bottom of the boat.

How many times Denver stood up, gazing all round the smooth unchanging horizon, always hopelessly and futilely, it would be impossible to say. Multitudinous times his heart started within him, and his head turned dizzy again with the recoil of his sudden hope, as some horizon-wave bearing its crest of foam white in the sun, took for an instant the semblance of a sail, and then subsiding again was lost, and how many times did his eyes, foiled, and haggard, and desperate, return baffled to Laura's face again! It indeed would be hard to say how often his eyes, totally unused to scanning the sea and its signs, were thus deluded by some strange transitory appearance, and ever his inward despair grew with each successive disappointment.

The day always wore slowly on, the sun was over their heads at the zenith, and then long past them on the other side again. Every three or four minutes they had to wet their heads to assuage the heat, longing all the while that they could only dare to put the cool moist sea-water between their dry thirst-bitten lips, for thirst, at first an inconvenience, now began to grow intolerable. Denver at last bethought him of stretching the cloak like an awning from thwart to thwart in the narrow prow

so as to obtain shelter for Laura under it. This was done, but first some whispered conversation took place between them, he seeming unwilling to do something she told him, until at last she said in a voice strangely decided for her, "If you don't do as I tell you, I will myself." Then he stepped reluctantly to where his wife was and spoke to her.

She took no notice of him the first time. Then again when he reiterated, "The sun will scorch you to death unless you come under the shelter," she looked round at him with a face that made him start, so dreadful was the contempt it seemed to express.

"Die where you like," she only said; "die where you will, *I* choose to die here." Then both he and Laura saw that it was useless to address her again, for she was mad. Denver himself refused positively to lie down under the cloak, and sat silently in the hot open air. He was too used to the sun to fear sun-stroke. Presently the fitful gusts of wind beginning to strengthen, and blowing for awhile, though from the hot north, cooled somewhat the sultry atmosphere.

The two lines were always slack, several times he had gashed the brown hair-covered skin of his arm to resoak the baits with his blood, but all exertion seemed useless and the deep water deserted by all animal life. Again and again the stains were washed out of the rags, and at last he grew hopeless, and gave up attending to them. Since the daylight had really permitted him to think and act without prejudice, a deep soul-benumbing sense of despondency had taken hold on him and begun to enervate his whole moral being. His strong keen eyes were worn

out, and blinded, with trying to pierce the blank confines where the faultlessly modelled dome of the sky seemed to rest on the waves. The pallid day-moon, that hung so like a flock of cloud in the mid-air, was now no longer to be seen, and the scorching sunlight blinded and maddened him. He remained silent for a while, motionless, with his brown sinewy wrists and hands knitted over his face, but after a time, he got up, and unable to resist some inner impulse, he lifted gently a corner of the shawl so as to look on Laura's face and figure for an instant.

She lay half sleeping with closed eyes, and a frightened look on her features, which were slightly stained by the sun into a complexion which in no way diminished her beauty. Just at her neck a button was undone, and over the apple of her throat, otherwise whiter than ivory, a brown rim showed where the sun had reached. The whole head lay framed in its rich profusion of warm golden hair, which glittering where the sunbeams reached it, lay spread out, and rippling round her face on the concave boards like an aureole.

As the lover bent over this spectacle of his mistress's beauty, a tumult of wild agony mastered his soul, and showed visibly in all his features, as he realized the slow and lingering death which might be, even now, environing her. He covered the cloak down without seeming to wake her, and once more sat down twisting his hands over his face as if in a spasm of internal pain. All his blind infatuated tenderness and still blinder love, unless help came soon, could do nothing for her, but was come to this, to sit watching her die a death of lingering pain,

and all he could do would be to kiss her uselessly, and wait helplessly by her side. This time yesterday on board the becalmed ship, he would have shuddered, and turned pale at the mere imagination of such a prospect, but now with it visibly before him he sat as if he were stupefied or stunned.

By the position of the sun, it must have now been about six in the evening, in another hour the sun would set, and leave them in total darkness again, but for the present there were no signs of the evening, and everything glittered still with undiminished, though slightly mellowed power of light. Laura still lay motionless and Denver sat watching by her, always revolving idle conjectures which ended in nothing, save in producing a still gloomier view of their situation every time that he considered it. At times he strained his eyes into the cloudless, now yellowing, sky, in the vain hope of discovering any mist or vapour which might indicate rain, for his thirst tortured him and made it terrible for him to look on the tantalizing sea-water. Everywhere he was baffled; the depths of his own heart, the sky, and the unbroken horizon lines, brought nothing but discouragement and deeper dejection to him; and yet at times, it seemed so impossible that such a fate could envelope him and Laura after all the protestations that had passed between them, and the mutual love and hope they had for each other, that once he began inadvertently to laugh—it was a mere twitching of the facial muscles, but to any one who could have seen this it would have appeared as if the workings of madness were in his brain,—caught from Dorothy's.

Meanwhile the sun sank lower and lower, and its rays

slanting horizontally across the waves showed the workings of Denver's face, lowering out in intense glow and deep shadow, till it became fearful to look at. The shadow of the boat stretched further and further along the waves, till at last the burning rim of the sun touched, joined, and dipped into the sea, and began to disappear slowly and steadily, and so palpably it seemed, that one might almost have looked to see the steam of boiling water rise in the sky. Over the western horizon, the sky became all ablaze with lustrous yellow, and all the width of surface in the ocean turned green with its reflection.

A long trail of scintillating glitter travelling over the foam and greenery of the sea, arrived dancing and flashing up to the boat, as in mad glee and mockery of the two figures (the man and woman) clasped together in its prow, Laura with her hair spread over his neck, and two or three tangles of it, bright with the dying sun, blown and streaming in the wind, their lips and faces pressed one to another, and lit up into a kind of enthusiasm.

For awhile they had forgotten even their wretchedness in their great love, for with nothing else in the world they had at least this to satiate them. It was a beautiful and yet a terrible picture, taken with its inward meanings and outward surroundings. Their faces were set to the light and Dorothy being behind them received their shadows full over her. She had turned, and was looking at them clasped as they were together; there was a kind of fiercely sinister smile on her lips, and in her dark deep-set eyes such a look of exulting malice and mockery, that I know no words to describe it with,—then

the expression changed into one of intense hatred, and she sank back again into her old position.

It is peculiar to this latitude that darkness swiftly and almost simultaneously comes with the sinking of the sun, and even now the night, hardly kept back by the radiation of the last glittering fire-point visible, began to sweep in long reaches of gloom over the hollows made by the profoundly heaving ocean, and once more the faint clusters of stars gleamed forth, slowly brightening down from the dark depth of the zenith, till they reached the verges of the sea. Soon the limitless surface of the sea, still hot with the sun, was bathed and enveloped in the coolness and secrecy of night,—and for that whole day these three had touched no nutriment.

THE BLACK SWAN.

CHAPTER VIII.

Nothing new happened during the evening, all was dark and silent over the sea. The boat always drifted with the wind, to what point of the compass it would be impossible to tell till moonrise; undulating slightly and splashing the waves, it left a glimmering half-seen trail of phosphor behind it like a line drawn in the dark by a wet lucifer-match. Just after sunset a thick band of clouds rose all over the sky, veiling such dim light as was shed by the stars, and everything was in utter obscurity. Miles away from them in one place the sea grew all alive with pale fire, and the clouds opened far away overhead, as if one of them had dissolved into rain, but neither Denver nor Laura noticed this and the stars were soon hidden again. They both sat together straining their eyes into the blind darkness, the fever of thirst burning into their very brains, he wearying his lips with useless kisses on hers, and she leaning passively in his arms. About midnight utterly worn-out and tired, they lay down in the bottom of the boat and tried to sleep. Hunger and thirst had perceptibly weakened Laura, who was naturally of a delicate constitution; whenever he took her hands in his own they were limp and powerless, and the pulses beat languidly and slowly. In a while she began to slumber, but as yet there could be no rest to Denver's sedulous conscience and brain: it

was frightful to lie there and feel starvation and death creeping upon them from every side. If his mind had suffered from the confinement of the horizon-lines by day, how still more terrible the same feeling became now that he was shut in and blinded by the darkness! It was a morbid feeling which grew upon him, till he believed at times that he could scarce stretch his hands out without bruising them against the solid confines which environed him, and this feeling so increased that at last it seemed as if he were buried alive with Laura; and he pressed her tight in his arms in a kind of insanity.

Turning his face upwards however with a profound sense of refuge and relief, his eyes always found a resting-place between the narrow sides of the boat, in the countless clusters of constellations, shining and glittering through the openings of the clouds overhead; till watching them, his sight, weakened by too much effort, caused them to swim and dance one with another like fire-flies.

Hunger, endured dumbly for a while, becomes strangely soporific and paralysing on the nerves, and this lack of energy which it causes, is one of the chief reasons why people starve so easily in the midst of great cities. Laura all this while slept uneasily if dreamlessly, for all sleep is dreamless till the moment of waking up they say; but her restless respiration showed the unsettled condition of her mind. Denver himself at intervals caught a little sleep, but no rest or repose, for always some disconnected idea or dream possessed his brain causing him soon to wake with its oppression. Once he was wandering in a burning forest, he had lost the track and got more entangled in its fiery mazes each minute, and was carrying Laura, who was

in a swoon, between the great blazing trees. Then again he had lost his way on the "Split Stones" * in a dark starless night, and always Laura was in his arms; and always he woke just as some catastrophe was about to occur: and then feeling that he really embraced her in safety, a wild tumult of joy would possess his soul, but died again swiftly like a flash of lightning, as the knowledge of the reality out of which his dream had formed an allegory, came back to him.

The broken-up clouds once more slowly drifted off in the wind over the horizon, and presently the largely increased quarter moon rose over the sea, with a glittering trail of silver scintillant light, and when it was high enough for its brightness to reach the bottom of the boat, it lit up dimly the two apparently sleeping forms. Laura had separated and woven, as it were, two cords out of her golden hair, and wound them round Denver's neck in a lustrous tangle, so as to bind his face still beside her own. It seemed like an exquisitely tender effort to assure him, when speech failed in sleep, of her still unyielding love and cleaving to him till the end; but his face looked worn and haggard; in the moonlight it could be plainly seen that he was not sleeping—each token of her passion for him only served to deepen the profound wretchedness of his soul. It was not the mere sense of compassion created by love for her beauty and youth, or the idea, terrible to us as it is, of such a frail flower as Laura Conway, withering and dying of hunger and drought, because her beauty was a thing all but forgotten and swept away in the mad torrent of his passion—

* An enormous geological formation of shattered rock strata and precipices near where he had lived.

his love was an intense intangible unintelligible worship, of which he could have explained no more than that it existed. It might have been her beauty which ensnared him at first, but now the object of his love was changed to something incorporate and invisible, for it was her soul, her own personal identity transmuted and fused into his own which he loved; it was the idea of this soul, common to each of them, having to sunder and disperse in the mystery of death, which maddened him beyond all measure of control.

He lay there trying to calm himself after each mental outburst of horror and passion, and hardly daring to stir in his position lest it should disturb Laura's sleep, which, as it was, seemed as uneasy as the waves of a placid sea under the sudden gusts of the wind. After a while he carefully left her side, untying the entangled hair without waking her, and stood up in the boat. Two or three more weary hours; at intervals he could be seen getting up and feeling the lines as if by a sort of mechanical impulse, but always without result. He sat with his elbows on his knees and his chin resting on his hands, looking restlessly into the luminous haze of the moonlight, for a sudden fear had struck him that some ship might still pass them without sign or knowledge of their presence: and it would be impossible to describe the agony of weariness and despair with which this idea beset him, as he watched uselessly till the faint undefined indications of the dawn, showing greyer and greyer, began to consume the darkness—until the golden sun at length rose, and in its splendour and might changed the bright moon to a faint fleck lost in the delicate purple of the morning sky.

Then he turned hopelessly from the sea and sat watching Laura's face by the increasing light, till presently the wan countenance of the sleeper, as if disturbed by the magnetism of his gaze, turned wearily up to his.

The keen edge of her thirst had quite drowned all sense of hunger, and that again itself after awhile, had turned to a dull kind of somnolent sickness, which seemed to consume her whole frame, making her eyes and brain giddy, so that as she now strove to rise, she fell back again and pressed her hands to her face and brow, while Denver leant down over her. The sight made him apparently desperate, for a sudden thought came to him, and he seized up the line hanging idly from the boat, and taking the hook at the end of it, cut with it a gash in his arm. The red blood came though with feeble flow : then holding Laura's head up with one hand, he tried to set this to her lips. They were covered with red before, in her weak state, she knew what he was doing, for she had closed her eyes to avoid the sudden influx of morning light, but when she really knew what he was about, a fit of irrepressibly violent shuddering seized her, and passed through her whole frame, and she shrank and struggled away from him and fell back in a swoon.

Her lips and teeth were tight closed and he could not dis sever them, and the blood on his arm ceased flowing and congealed after a while. I think that for a time, hanging over her and kissing her wildly, he lost his reason. Once he rose to his feet in a kind of phrenzy and made a couple of steps towards Dorothy, for he fancied he heard a low laugh. There was a terrible fire in his eyes, but his face turned bloodless and he went back to Laura again and

clasped her up in his arms, trembling all over and calling her name piteously, till at length a faint reappearance of vitality stole like a pale flame over her face, and her senses returned to her. Denver was too sick at heart to be the first to speak till she said faintly,

"Oh my head! my head aches; put some water on my forehead. I'm going to be ill, my whole body's in a fever. Why did you frighten me by cutting your arm? It sends me sick. Gabriel, put me down on the boards."

He laid her down as she asked, and made a pillow for her head out of the jacket and the cloak, and she lay there nearly the whole day; later on, as the sun grew hotter, he took the cloak and spread it so as to shelter her again. All the time he did nothing but hang over her, keeping her forehead wet with the sea water and blowing on to it with his dry lips to keep it cool.

There was nothing to look at in the shining sultry waves of the sea, and he was tired and sick of pulling up the empty useless lines. The pallid moon sank unnoticed at noontide, while he sat over Laura, hardly knowing what he was about, and his face became more and more haggard and wild-looking, as in his despair he saw she grew weaker and weaker hour by hour. She hardly spoke now, her eyes were shut, and a slight—each time fainter—pressure on Denver's hand was the only sort of communication which passed between them for several hours.

The morning had long changed into noon and now at last the red sun dipped again into the waves and sank; this time there was a lurid purple band of mist or vapour flaming all round, and by this a sort of gloomy twilight

was prolonged for awhile, and then the night came utterly.

Laura still lay where Denver had placed her : he himself worn out, but sleepless, lay down beside her, but dared not slumber lest she should rouse and speak to him. At last the darkness was a little dispelled by the light of the coming moon reflected over the horizon ; their white faces and dark figures could be seen dimly in the dusk of the boat, while Dorothy remained still visible above the gunwale.

If Denver could have retained the heart and courage to continue looking into the darkness, he would have seen, just as the moon began to rise, the shadowy white form of a ship, all dim and blurred in the night but for its signal-lamps ; but with the ever-increasing light on the further side of it, so that its sails braced hard up fore and aft (as if sailing on a wind, as sailors say) showed luminously and half transparent. Presently it crossed the low-hanging moon, on which the light of the sun now fell in a half circle, and, though it may seem incredible, a deep shadow overspread the boat, travelling in a long line across the sea, as if a passing cloud obscured the light, while at the same time the dark *silhouette* of a two-masted vessel appeared plainly defined with its quarter-deck and forecastle against the light sky. Then it passed, shifting its course so that the moonlight fell upon it, in a way to be seen from the boat scarcely a mile away : it was now running right ahead with the light changeable wind. But Denver was too utterly and sullenly hopeless to sit straining his eyes into the darkness on this third night as he had done on the second, and sailing fast, it passed miles

and miles away into the tenebrous atmosphere; first its form disappeared, then its lights. Dorothy either could not or would not see it, although her face was turned in its direction.

Truly a decree of destiny seemed to hang over Denver and all connected with him.

The morning's light came silently and found Laura by then well-nigh too weak to move from her position in the bottom of the boat, where she lay like a frail flower thrown down and broken by the wind. It could not be said that she felt now the exact sensations of hunger or thirst in themselves, for, as I have shown, they had in some degree passed away and changed into an intolerable brain-oppressing weight of sickness and dizziness,—ever increasing; so that her weak limbs could scarce have supported her if she had tried to stand. It was a shocking change to have taken place in one so young and fair as Laura, and all in scarcely three days. The bright eyes were sunken and lustreless, the beautiful oval lines of her face were worn and hollow, her small cheekbones and chin showed sharp through the wasting flesh, and the tangled hair alone preserved its full profusion and beauty.

It was a strangely piteous sight to witness, for with her life her beauty in nowise seemed to ebb; and yet she was so fast weakening now, that as she lay in the bottom of the boat, half under the thwart near the prow, her head and white neck stretched back and supported on a hard pillow made by the coat rolled up on the stretcher meant for the rowers to set their feet to; as she lay there, I say, she was fast becoming incapable of motion, if not insensible.

The approach of death in circumstances like these is so gradual, that in the enervated condition of the body and mind consequent on their exhaustion, the sufferer hardly believes in its presence, until having undermined every stay to vitality, it springs forth swift as a tropical twilight, and all is over. Naturally, weak constitutions give way sooner than strong ones, and this is why in contrast with Laura, Denver still managed to keep his strength, though his spirit was broken, and on his soul a blind unreflecting despair was settled. The sight of her suffering rendered his worn face haggard and fierce as a starving wolf's. But it was no use struggling, all seemed to him the working-out of some predestined fate: only in the deep heart of his fatalistic nature he cursed the pitiless immovable spirit or master of destiny,—cursed and cursed again with a scowl on his brows and a blaze of fire reilluminating his sunken worn eyes, while he hung pressing his lips wildly on Laura's fever-parched forehead.

It was awful to watch the strength of this man's mind, at bay, panting and desperate, with only the dumb inarticulate elements around him to wreak his passion on, forced, writhing and unrelentingly, to turn back on the interior visions of its own imagination.

In the bottom of the boat between Laura and where Dorothy lay, mad, and sullenly alone, there was a cleared space of some seven or eight feet: in this when not hanging over Laura with eyes flaming like a panther's over its dying mate, Denver managed to pace backwards and forwards continually as a caged tameless animal does. It was a procedure which seemed terribly natural to him, for indeed the strain upon his reason had well-nigh broken it,

and only his fierce southern animal nature retained its empire over his brain. The girl still uttered no word of complaint, and this made the visible alteration in her strength and life all the more agonising to witness. He shuddered and dared not again offer her his own blood in dread of a second swoon, and he remembered dreadful stories of men whose thirst had been increased to madness, by drinking from each other's veins.

In the course of Denver's life, violent by nature as he was, he might often have thought of suicide as the preferable escape in certain emergencies of suffering or trouble; but it is well known that such men always look on death with dread when it comes by any save their own choice, for suicide has been indeed well defined as "the strongest utterance of desire for life which the human will can evince," and therefore I say it is no strange thing that Denver looked forwards to the death which awaited them both, with a nameless horror and shuddering. It was terrible to watch the way his mind struggled against its doom, and found reasons to cling to, and yearn for prolongation of life and yet could believe in no possible evasion of their doom. Had he not everything in life to live for,—why then should he die before his time? Looking at his life in the abstract, with all petty restrictions of will or position lost in the far distance where it seemed receding from him, it now made no such unhappy appearance as had seemed in the unquiet dream he had lived in on board the ship: he saw that he loved Laura and she reciprocated his passion with an intensity which few others have experienced in this weary satiated world, and that they could be still happy together—unutterably

happy, and that they were now dying without excuse or reason.

To die—to cease to exist—to look at his arm still with its old useless strength in it, and feel that in a while he would be without power over its movements, to use his vision now but think that in awhile his eyes would darken till they could no longer see Laura's face, that his ears would no longer hear her voice, that voice which once thrilled through his own soul;—to live still, and yet know that his senses were beginning to ebb like a sinking tide, or to dissolve like a pool of water sucked up by the power of the sun. To lie as if paralysed in helpless contemplation of the future unlived days, the warmth and effulgency of which shone so brightly in front of him, while the present slowly darkened and vanished around him, as the last sob of his life-breath exhaled into the dreary blank non-existent nothingness which men call death—leaving the life before him so miserably *un-lived*: it made him like some thirst-maddened animal tantalized by a transitory desert mirage. It was too terribly incredible.

Then he started up wildly, gazing on the monotonous blankness of the sky and the horizon-lines, and at the smooth glistening sea, like a man who expects to emerge from some dream which is stifling his very soul to death. All was vacant, the gleaming waves mocked his eyes everywhere, and the horizon stretched endlessly round the sky without hint or signal of the ship its confines had, unknown to him, disclosed the night before. The same old dull inarticulate despair returned on him—it was useless to struggle against destiny, and he went and laid him-

self down beside Laura with the intention of awaiting his end there.

He had covered her up with a cloak to keep the sun off and she never moved or spoke. After a while he got up suddenly and began pacing the boat again, praying in his heart that he might not die before Laura, not with the mere selfish desire of life to the uttermost, but because his morbid imagination had drawn a terrible picture of his own dead form in the bottom of the boat, with Laura still living, and perhaps calling to him and he unable to answer her: it made his fevered blood run cold. I know not whether it was owing to his mental condition or the prostration of strength which he suffered from (for his vital power was now fast beginning to ebb and the fever burned hotter and hotter in his veins), but by fits and starts, every object his eyes met was turned blood-red, and his ears rang and tingled with a kind of humming tune while a peculiar dizzy sensation came over him, till he shook as if with the palsy.

Laura seemed in a while as if she had fallen into a deep sleep, uninterrupted save for a slight rattling in her throat. Her eyes looked shockingly shrunken now that they were closed, and the blood had withdrawn from her lips, but they were dark with fever. Yet the spark of her life, though it waned within her, still had its moments when it flickered up, as if striving to rekindle itself, and once or twice she endeavoured to rise and speak to her lover hanging over her, but her words were unintelligible, her brain was become delirious.

Once more the sun had crossed the steep blue sky and sunk, and the night came on, and in this night, either

because she was mad, or because she could endure thirst no longer, Dorothy drank the sea-water, long, and deeply, and the effect this bitter draught produced on her was, that when the morning's light came, she was raving. All through the darkness the wind at times rose boisterously, but having nothing to contend with save the passive waves, it was strange to witness how silent its deep gusts were. Owing to some change in the atmosphere there was no phosphor-fire now in the dark sea, and the wind blowing from due south, it was almost cold. Denver sat all night over Laura speaking to her at times, hardly knowing what he was saying, but getting no answers and not daring to disturb her, lest he should turn her sleep into something deeper. The day broke tempestuously over the sea, and in the grey half-light of the dawn, as the boat swung about on the waves, she lay so still that he uttered a terrible exclamation and fell down beside her on his knees. She opened her eyes and moved her lips slightly for she was still living.

Just then he heard something like a shriek behind him and turning round he saw Dorothy, bending forward and looking at Laura in such a manner that he watched her, unable to turn away.

Once again a point of fire shot out suddenly over the eastern wind-blown waves, and a circle of sunlight radiated through the cloudless but windy sky, and a stormy lurid reflection of the sun suddenly lit up everything, broken and diversified into a thousand shapes on the crests of the strong waves, while the white shifting foam-flecks sweeping up their dark under-sides, conveyed an appalling idea of the black angry sea's profoundness. Every now and

then two or three waves uniting together would bear the boat up, half hidden in their flying spray and foam-flakes, high overhead as if to exhibit it in mockery to the rest of the sea, as a cat plays with a bird, letting it flutter up, well knowing that its wings are broken; then again it would be sunken into a deep dark hollow and lost to view. Over all this, to a blind man unable to see the boat, the shriek which had attracted Denver's attention would have vibrated, dominating the hissing and surging of the vexed foam, like the cry of an angry wind-baffled sea-bird.

Suddenly Dorothy saw that he was looking at her, and she made a motion with her hand towards Laura and shrieked out again—

“Not dead yet? is she always to live on and make my eyesight a curse to me? What have I not done to kill and destroy her, that she still lingers there like a starving snake? Oh God! if it's useless after all, and I've given my soul to hell and my body to death only to be cheated! I'll strangle her sooner myself. I fired the ship to drive you out of it—I caused the fire—I—I—I! It's gone on burning in me ever since, I drank out of the sea to quench it, and it's got up into my very throat and brain, and now I'm going to die before you! No! no! no! I'll live to desecrate her grave yet. She'll die in this boat and rot in it, and when it falls to pieces with decay or gets sunk, her bones will sink with it—you can't help her. Ah! you may glare at me! you know whom you owe all this to now. I told you you should learn what a woman's love turned to hatred could do.”

She had risen on her feet, and now she choked and gasped in her utterance and set her hand to her throat, as

if she were strangling, then staggered and fell back on the stern-seat, and half slipped off it, so that the back of her head caught on the gunwale, with its long dishevelled black hair partly streaming in the water, partly over her throat. The pupils of her eyes contracted as if by a sudden spasm of pain into mere pin-points, and there was a shudder through her frame, and a convulsive grasp of the empty air with her hands. The light of the fully-risen sun fell right on her face, as the boat lifted on the foam-dashed glittering crests of the stormy waves. She gazed back full on it wildly, but unblinded, with wide eyes, their pupils dilated till they occupied the whole of the iris: the bright corresponding image and reflection of the sun flashed back out of them unflinchingly, for she was dead!

THE BLACK SWAN.

CHAPTER IX.

“‘BLACK SWA’ C. S. C.* My God! Why it’s a piece of one of our own ships! She’s been on fire—where did you find it?”

“Well, Mr. Newton, the man on watch in the fore heard something strike against the bows. We were tacking again’ the wind, and we all heard it come rubbing down along the off side, where the sea washed round: it couldn’t get free like, till it was left astern; and then we all see it by the light in the water, and the ship was hove to, while we noosed it up with a slip-knot, and the other piece also—they was heavy enough to haul too.”

“It’s clear as daylight there’s something happened; it’s a lump burnt out of the stern-post, with the outer plank let into it—why we were just looking to meet her.” And so saying the master of the ‘Albatross’ knelt down on the deck, examining the dripping fragment of charred wood, with the well-known but half obliterated letters on it, which his sailors had found. A second piece lay beside it, also burnt and blackened; he knew they were quite fresh in the water, for there were no sea-shells or marine weeds clinging to them.

Just then the first mate came up on the quarter-deck,

* Colonial Shipping Company.

saying to the master that there was some story among the men in the steerage, of the cook's boy having declared that while sitting out on the bowsprit, scouring a pot the preceding night, he had seen an apparently empty boat for a moment, and then lost sight of it, and been ashamed to mention this lest he should get into trouble for raising a false alarm, or be disbelieved. All the crew of the large vessel, on some pretext or another, could be seen looking on, gathered round in the dusky grey light before the sunrise: the boy being among them was called forward and reiterated positively his first statement. When asked why he had not spoken before, he answered,

"Well, sir, I just see it for an instant like, and wasn't sure whether there was anybody in it or not, and couldn't find it agin. I should have thought a shadow had come over it on'y there were no clouds afore the moon, and while I wasn't certain, I was called forrad— But I did speak of it, sir."

The captain's sun-browned features had grown anxious and troubled, like a man in strong perplexity; and he turned round consulting apart with the two mates, and was heard to say, "Something's clearly gone wrong with poor Gregory's* ship: Johnson ought to know how to manage her though. Why I knew the Black Swan well."

"So do I cap'n—I've served in her," interrupted a grey-bearded sailor, coming forward deferentially; "the name ought to be writ in red characters, I can't read myself, but I should know 'em among a thousand. Why I think there's one gone,—there oughter be four to that. It's

* He had heard of this man's death at the Cape.

burnt out," and the man stooped down examining the log, while they all gathered around the pool of water that had dripped from it on the deck, and the steersman near whom they stood craned forward to look over their heads, in the intervals of manipulating his wheel.

The master and his mates again began speaking together. One of them said two or three days more or less could make no ultimate difference to the voyage, and the substance of their consultation was that they determined to return on their course and examine the sea as narrowly as possible to endeavour to make some more certain discovery. This was the more easy inasmuch as the Albatross had been for more than a week beating and battling vainly against an adverse if not very powerful wind, which would now entirely favour their plan, which was to sail in a gradually decreasing circle over an extent of nearly seven hundred miles, so as at last to reach the centre of the pivot round which, as it were, they had turned : if nothing were discovered of the ship they supposed burnt, or perhaps was burning now, all they could do would be to resume their course.

The full blinding effulgence of the sun burst presently over the waves, just as the Albatross swung heavily round in the trough of the sea, its sails flapping for an instant, till the wind caught and filled them out again, and then the reversed vessel swept back over the no longer opposing undulation of the ocean. All that day they sailed with a careful look-out and towards the evening another spar was discovered floating half submerged in the water with something clinging or fastened to it. On its being neared it was found to be, as was supposed, a long

piece of the bowsprit, burned off at the end. A dead, drowned, tailless monkey clung tenaciously to it, and its hairy skin was singed in parts. The man who had been on the Black Swan recognised the animal, and said that its name was "Tom Jones," which name had been given it in consequence of its resemblance to a man among the crew, who had always ill-treated it in consequence. Its face was agonised now and stiffened, poor thing, into a strangely human look of fright, which made the men looking at it shudder despite themselves, as they thought of what must have happened to its more human associates. Their fears for the ship were now increased to a dead certainty. It would be impossible for me in the limited space I can spare, to describe correctly the effect that a catastrophe, such as this appeared to have been, has on the mind of a sailor. The dangers of the treacherous sea he expects and is prepared to accept, but amid the limitless expanse of waters that he passes his storm-beaten life on, to have suddenly to battle with such a thing as a rebellion of the fire he carries with him to preserve his life, such a catastrophe, I say, he is absolutely unprepared for, and stupefied at.

The whole of the ship's company felt sobered and went about the reeling decks quietly, or stood about talking in groups when not occupied, for they all knew the ship well and some of them knew men of the crew. A more anxious look-out than ever was kept, but nothing further happened till the night came over the sea. Speed was slackened, and the Albatross, lighted up with lanterns, sailed carefully through the darkness. It is strange how the motions of inanimate substances which obey human guidance appear at times to respond to the different mind-

conditions of their masters. The ship seemed to sweep forward, almost as anxiously as those on board of her.

Anxious ears waited for shoutings, many anxious eyes peered into the darkness for signals; but nothing happened, all was dark and silent over the cloud-shadowed sea, only the wind increased, whistling boisterously through the rigging overhead, and the turbid dark water, glistening here and there as it caught the reflections from the passing lamps, seemed, under cover of the darkness, to become more tumultuous every moment. At intervals a hollow thud would be felt on the prow, as it cleft through some strong wave, and a great shower of white foam-spray rose gracefully into the light, blown by the whistling wind, hissing and weltering across the decks, or swept back into the gloom it emerged from. Just dimly discernible in the night, a long trail of white foam seemed always endlessly spun and reeled out from under the dark stern, while overhead, where not obscured by the clouds, the stars shone in brilliant nebulous clusters through the black sky, until the moon rose over the tempestuous ocean, obscuring them and lighting up the wild scene.

"Mad as the sea and wind
When each contends which is the mightier."

Before morn the wind shifted and blew from due south, and it became in consequence cold, but this was even the more favourable to the Albatross, as she staggered along through the high foaming billows. The grey colourless daylight broke gradually over the sky, reflected back on to the dark water underneath, and just before sun-up, as they called it, an alarm was raised through the ship.

Two or three men could be seen on the forecastle, pointing into the distance and shadow which still lay unconsumed over the ocean towards the north, shouting (half the sound being blown away by the wind), "There they are right away down!" The master and mates and all who could leave their posts hurried up on to the wet decks, and scrambled into the forecastle. A large dark speck, which their keen eyes fashioned into the shape of an oarless rudderless boat with two figures in it, could be seen plainly, tossing about on the white tumultuous waves. The ship was bearing right down on them, straining in all its cords and canvases.

Just then the light of the sun broke radiating over the stormy sea, clearing away the dusky half-obscurity, and the master of the ship obtained a spy-glass and brought it to bear on the boat and its occupants. They were about three miles off, but a strange sight was suddenly brought within two or three feet of his eyes, by the telescope. It was a large old-fashioned boat, wide, and flat, and strong. A woman was standing at one end of it, violently confronting and upbraiding a man who knelt down, apparently leaning over some one in the bottom. Suddenly the woman dashed her arms up wildly as though she had been struck with sun-stroke and fell back in the boat. The man rose and clasped his forehead wildly with his hands and looked right in the woman's face, for it still remained visible; and a fearful look, indicative of some incomprehensible feeling (not sorrow as could be seen even at that distance) convulsed his features; then he bent down in the boat and looked up no more, and his face was hidden. They were lost for a moment in a hollow of the sea; and

when they rose into the light of the sun again, it gleamed fearfully in the woman's eyes, but she never moved to avoid it.

Meanwhile the ship came nearer and nearer, driven before the still increasing wind. A boat was got all ready to launch into the rough sea and its crew stood near it. The ship-master still looked through his telescope from the fore-castle, at times giving it up to the second mate who stood near him; the other officer was about the decks giving orders. He sent five or six of the sailors swarming up into the rigging, to pull down or clew up some of the sails and put the ship aback, when the proper time came; once owing to the temporary negligence of the two men steering, caused by their curiosity, the fore part of the ship struck so heavily in the sea, that the angry churned spray flew up all over it, and he rushed up rating them soundly. The eagerness and excitement of the men seemed imparted to the very heart of the great Albatross, as she swept recklessly dashing the violent waves aside from her prow, and in twenty minutes they were approached nearly within a mile of the boat. At last when the ship was within nearly a hundred and fifty yards of them, one of the men on the fore-castle shouted down the wind. The sound must clearly have reached those in the boat (although those behind could hardly hear him), but nothing stirred, no notice was taken although the woman's face was turned just towards them. At last they passed the boat, some forty yards from it, and got to windward. Suddenly some of the great sails fell and were furled up, the two topsails were braced up wedge-wise so as to counteract each other, and the Albatross slackened speed, though still

moving forward with the impetus of her late motion ; and finally all but stopped when within eighty yards past the boat. The launch hanging off the quarter-deck was swung down, with some trouble, into the surf and surge which dashed up the sides as if to devour it, but at last it floated safely on the shifting black water, and five men hanging in the shrouds sprang down into it. One held on preventing its gunwale from fouling the side, while the others with some difficulty, owing to the roughness, managed to unship their oars. Then the boat sprang from under the side, staggering and reeling against the wind, and dashed wildly into the showered spray of the turbid waves, the men pulling lustily. A large can placed at the bottom of the boat steamed and swirled with heat, which floated off in wreaths about their heads.

In the meantime a wall of mist had risen out of the east, even in defiance of the cold south wind : its edge was vaguely defined in places into the shape of clouds, and presently it rose so high, and grew so thick in its watery impalpability, that it obscured the new-risen sun. Then for a few moments it grew golden-coloured, like a mountain-mist at sunrise, and a part of the sea-water surrounding it turned lustrous and green, though its transitory radiance speedily died out. Always the edges of the clouds kept separating into fleecy fragments and particles which flew across the sky in all directions, and a dull grey shadow fell everywhere ; the waves, again turning to a profound blackness, contrasted harshly with the white foam which crowned their ever-forming ridges.

It would have been a strange wild scene to be present at ; the straining masts of the great ship rolled from side

to side, as the hull underneath swung about on the waves, the foam dashed up, boiling and surging under its dark sides, and it still advanced slowly in the wind. The whole of the men left on board, all save the steersmen, were leaning in a group over the bulwark; under the forecastle, all anxiously watching the progress of the boat, pulling against the wind and sea. Once or twice the boat's crew endeavoured, while resting on their oars, to attract the attention of those they were about to succour, but without success. The noise of the contending wind and water drowned everything, and the sound was driven behind them, and Dorothy's dead face gave no token of sensibility. Denver had thrown himself into the bottom of the boat, and hidden his head in Laura's hair by the side of her cold face, his arm clasping her throat and shoulder tightly. Laura's face lay back uncovered : her eyes shut, her cheeks colourless, and her lips dark with fever, added strange beauty to her wasted features. Her figure was slightly gathered together with the knees drawn upwards, and was clothed in the blue serge she had covered her night-gown with, her white feet were bare, a beautifully modelled ankle showing under the torn hem. Both their figures were covered in places by splashes of salt spray and there was water dashing from side to side in the bottom of the boat. Perhaps Denver expected each minute to be overwhelmed, and was clasping Laura ready to sink with her.

Here was a scene to impress even the hurried and not over-impressible mariners.

The strength of the wind intensifying to a perfect tumult at times, the spray was driven off the crests of the cowering waves like mist or rain, as the boat with

its rowers still struggled manfully through the water: and the foam from their oars dashed in puffs over their heads, wetting their faces and beards till they had to stop to wipe them on their sleeves.

At last they reached the undirected boat, which it must be remembered was being driven towards them by the wind. The waves drove both the boats up together with a heavy shock, and the spray whirled up in a fountain between the sides.

Laura, still living, opened her languid sick eyes, and saw dizzily as in a dream a sailor's sunburnt face leaning over the side looking at her, his red hands holding on by the gunwale. He made a rope's-end fast round the thwart, and turned round for an instant and shouting, "Steady! Steady! Ease her off, lads," he half stepped and half rolled over inside the gunwale, and a confused clamour of human voices rose in the wind, and another concussion struck and shook the boat. Two or three more sailors appeared for one instant, but her brain was so weak and delirious that she could understand nothing, and all became dark to her.

Denver was perfectly stunned with amazement, for two or three minutes he *dared not* believe in the sudden reality. Three strange men stood round him in the boat, which, made fast to another, was being pulled in the direction of a large ship which seemed to have sprung from the waves, he knew not how. Without a word spoken he saw that they had a can of some hot liquid with them, and they all simultaneously turned to where Laura lay. Utterly bewildered with the suddenness of what was passing round him, he asked no questions but

held the girl's head up eagerly— There was no time to speak. One of them knelt down and held the rim of the can to her parched lips. At first she hardly seemed to know what they wanted, but as the smell of the steam blew in her face, she began to sip eagerly from it for a while, then managed to take a draught and sank back exhausted. The can was then held out to him and he drank from it: its heat seemed to infuse sudden hope and vigour through all his nerves, like a thrill of electricity. He knelt down over Laura again and looked up excitedly for the can, and saw that they were trying to force a stream of the liquid in between Dorothy's now rigid lips and clenched teeth, and he got up and sprang at them, trying to get it.

"She's dead, damn her!" he cried fiercely. "Give me the coffee for the girl or her life will go too!" But they resisted and still persevered. The man holding the can said, "No, no, no, my man, wait a while or thou'lt do her an injury." These were the first words which passed between them. One at last muttered, "She must be dead, her teeth and arms are stiff," and they all returned over Laura. Some more of the life-giving liquid was poured down her throat, but she was too weak to make any acknowledgment and lay passively in Denver's arms; a slight flush however came over her cheeks.

The two boats, blown by the wind, were pulled rapidly in the direction of the ship. They arrived under the side, and as the boat swayed up and down on the waves next to the stern, none of the sailors could think how to get Laura's prostrate, half-senseless, form over on to the deck. Now a single rope ladder had been flung over the stern, with its

end trailing in the water ; and Denver, to the surprise of all, took her up fiercely, and yet as easily as a cat would its kitten, and holding her in one arm so as to have the other free, he climbed up the ladder and on to the deck, into the midst of the group of marvelling sailors. Dorothy was left in the boat alongside, and he heard the men clustering over her call out to the others on deck—"It's no use. She's stone dead !"

Thus once more they were in a position of safety : and seemingly secure in it.

THE BLACK SWAN.

CHAPTER X.

CONCEIVE the sensations of some lost soul, which drawn vainly struggling to the entrance of hell, and when most it gives up all hope, and the lurid flickering flames seem most agape for it,—conceive, I say, the sensations of this fear-benumbed spirit, should the mockery of the devils be changed suddenly to the welcoming smiles of the radiant angels, and it were to feel itself snatched from the dreaded fumes of the abyss, among the flowering sweet-scented blossoms of its despaired-of heaven with all its long luminous prospects. The past would seem like some hideous and incredible dream; the present like the futile imaginings of delirium. A just conception of this, alone, might help to form some idea of Denver's feelings, as jealously carrying Laura in his arms, he stood amid the group of mariners on the ship's deck. He was too stunned by the sudden prospect of life opened out before him to indulge in any premature self-congratulations, or indeed quite to credit the truth of his senses.

Laura was immediately taken below deck into the after-cabin. The stern of the Albatross was shaped and fitted up much as the Black Swan's had been; the sleeping-berths were placed in the same situation, and there being no passengers, they were occupied only by the

master and his mates. She was placed by Denver, who still refused all assistance, in a hammock swinging loose from a rafter in the roof of the main cabin. No questions were asked of Denver, but directly she was laid down, they all began by a common impulse to crowd into the cabin from the outer one. The sailors were ordered out again, and only three men stopped with him helping, as if they understood and sympathized perfectly with the occult causes of his eager breathless anxiety. They began slowly trying to get soup by spoonfuls down her throat: she swallowed at first, and then she seemed to resist and to wish to have no more, but they persisted. It was no use talking to her or entreating her as Denver did once or twice, for she seemed neither to hear nor to be able to answer. By assiduous efforts they managed at last to make her swallow about a cupful. There was brandy and laudanum in it, and it seemed almost immediately to turn her unnaturally lethargic weakness into real sleep. After tossing her thin hands about restlessly on the pillow for a while, she became utterly unconscious.

"There! if she sleeps for two or three hours she will be able to eat safely,—it might have been dangerous now," said one of them, looking closely on her, while Denver took some of the red golden tangles of her hair and laid them over her eyes and face, as if to keep the light off.

Then and then only could they get him to swallow for himself: this was about twenty minutes or even more after the first draught of coffee he had taken in the boat. He ate some salt meat and bread ravenously and drank the strong tea which was prepared as the best thing they

could give him (for it was not then a luxury in common use) till his craving for food was satisfied. They looked on wondering at the little he ate, but he was in such a condition of nervous excitement, that it became impossible for him to eat, after the first pangs of hunger were satiated, in spite of all he had gone through. He began to tremble all over; and a small flask of strong cordial was handed to him, and a draught from this somewhat restored him.

As I have said, the cabin they were in was just over the stern-part of the ship, and its windows looked out down the long trail of foam, undulating with the stormy waves which seemed so incessantly forming and following them, as they drifted along. A large seaman's chest was lashed tight under the sills, and the planks under foot were bare. A clock which had stopped hung on one side of the wall, and a framed and coloured print of the sinking of the 'Royal George' faced it, while an old twisted brass lamp swung free from the roof, all overrun with entangling lines of reflection from the stormy water-eddies round the rudder.

Laura now lay placidly enough in the hammock as these four men stood round her. The ship-master was a wind-bronzed sunburnt grey-headed sailor, of perhaps sixty, and seeing Denver had finished, he put the first questions to him.

"It's the mercy of the Almighty that you've been found in this way. But you can't have passed very long without food, if you eat like that."

"We were four days in the boat," he replied, "I and she; if you had not seen us we must have been dead in a few hours." He then gave them some short account of

the fire, but he was too tired to say much. How the men, one and all, had perished, he told them minutely. When asked if he could tell how the flames had first broken out, they all must have noticed the start and visible change which came over him as he told them how he had seen the fire first, but knew nothing more about it. They asked him who the other woman was and how she had died. He looked at them keenly, with gleaming resolute eyes for an instant and said sternly,

"She was once my wife. She drank the salt water and went mad."

Her death the captain had seen himself, though he said nothing, and he merely asked,

"Do you wish to see her again?"

"No."

All three looked in each other's faces, but without speaking. They might have imagined something of the truth, strange and dreadful as it was, but whatever they might have suspected was of an inarticulate nature to them and they must have seen plainly from Denver's compressed lips and the resolution his face expressed that it would be more than useless questioning him further.

Meanwhile the movement of the ship seemed to have grown slower and slower, till at last it had almost ceased. The waves could be heard beating and breaking idly round the sides, and the captain looked hastily out of the narrow casement and on to the sea; then he turned round, and saying something to the two others in a low voice, went hurriedly out at the door, without further explanation. His footsteps could be heard going out on to the deck, and

everything was so still overhead, that they could hear the talk of the sailors.

The whole of the inferior crew were clustered on the quarter-deck, discussing what had happened, and looking over the side, where the two boats still swam, in one of which Dorothy was laid out as she had died, with the cloak wound round her form; could they have known her story, it would have been terrible indeed to watch her lying so helpless now that she was dead, but to them a prostrate figure with a cloak flung over it was perchance no very unusual sight. Two or three men were still in the boats alongside; one of these lifted a fold of the cloth off the dead face, with its wide nostrils, clenched teeth and filmy staring eyes, but dropped it again with a shudder. They none of them wished it on board if it could be helped, for they superstitiously believed its presence would bring misfortune to the ship.

Immediately on his reaching the deck, the captain gave some order which caused the ship's own boat to be hauled up the side and hung temporarily half over the bulwark, all wet and dripping with water. They then asked what they should do with the dead body; and he directed the boatswain to get an auger and bore two or three holes in the bottom of the boat, and this was done.

It presently fell off from the side and lagged behind in the rough waves, but it took seven or eight minutes before it was twenty feet astern. One could have seen that the boat was filling, for the corpse moved once or twice and the cloak fell off its livid desolate face, and it seemed to rise in the bottom. When about half sunk, it swung round the stern close to the rudder, and Denver standing near the

casement, looked out as he heard a splash, and saw the half-floating form, with its pallid face and ghastly eyes, staring, as he thought, right up at his from just under him. At that moment it turned slightly, and a shudder, inconceivable in its horror, convulsed him irresistibly. The boat fell away far behind till he almost lost sight of her, though her form always rose nearer its edge, while his eyes remained following its course, fixed and fascinated. Every moment it rose more heavily on the waves and sank deeper in the dark bubbling hollows of the water. At last a quantity of advancing spray splashed over it and sank it instantly; the body was seen for a moment, then, most likely caught under one of the thwarts, it was sucked down out of sight to all eternity, in the vortex created by the boat, while a whirling eddy of white foam, ascending the dark curled under-side of the overwhelming wave, was all that was left to bear witness for a few moments, to the last episode in Dorothy's weary, passion-baffled life and death.

Some inexpressible burst of relief, a wild feeling of freedom such as an imprisoned eagle might be stunned and overwhelmed by, on finding the vainly beaten against, long fastened door of its cage left open, caused her husband to start with his heart suddenly beating violently: Laura stirred in her sleep, uttering a low-voiced exclamation but like a moan, and he came hastily to her side: but otherwise her sleep seemed still placid and undisturbed.

There must have been some good reason for the almost indecent haste with which the dead body was consigned to the waves; almost before they had seen the end, the different sailors began to move swiftly about the decks, each carrying out some separate order with all the

diligence he was master of. They could be seen constantly directing their looks towards the north-east. Yet the wild fitful violence of the cold south wind seemed to abate every minute, till at last, as I have said, it almost suddenly ceased. There was a too suddenly ominous hush, and warmth and calm spread over all the visible face of Nature, too much resembling the invariable lull which precedes its wildest and most frantic efforts. Something unnatural was about to take place, and the sailors knew it and were preparing for it.

From horizon to zenith the once blue sky was completely covered and whitened with the dull fleecy remnants of the morning mist, which had risen so unaccountably in the east. Here and there at intervals through small momentary apertures, the gleaming sun and the blue sky still showed, and their transient rays and beams speckled the all-livid surface of the palpitating sea with strangely shifting spots of tremulous green, too soon dispelled and divested of their magic radiance as the clouds blew over each other. But under all this transitory flower-like greenery, the treacherous sea concealed its purpose as a snake lies hid in the grass, ready to lift its head and sting when the time comes. Presently the mists overhead all joined together, shutting the sun out everywhere.

Covered in all directions with detached patches and long continuous lines of white dissolving foam from the crests of the subsided waves, the salt bitter ocean, livid and panting, appeared like some furious animal regaining its wasted energy and dissipated strength before the final effort of its fierce rage. Where it chafed round the black sides of the ship, it seemed like a lion which purposely lashing its flanks

with its tail, grows angry under the self-infliction. At length, however, all was absorbed into the smooth calm undulations which rolled seemingly from horizon to horizon: on them the Albatross rose and fell without further movement. The canvas aloft was all furled; but the sailors still hung about the dizzy heights in the rigging obeying the shouts from the deck. The sea had grown so calm that the shadow of the reversed hull and the great masts fell darkly and languidly reflected deep down in the grim water.

It was strange how anxious the sailors all looked; what had happened during the morning, seemed now forgotten and passed away from their minds. Down below the two officers had quitted the cabin where Laura was laid, and Denver was left alone with her. She still lay in the hammock, but she was now no longer sleeping despite her eyes being closed, for her feverish hands moved up and down continually, sometimes pressed on her head sometimes entangled and wound in her long tresses, and her lips moved deliriously though she could scarcely articulate.

The sense of utter escape, as from some soul-poisoning spell, which had penetrated Denver's mind and nerves when he saw Dorothy sink, would be of itself difficult to describe in all its acuteness, but now, watching over Laura's strange mental and bodily condition, a terrible heart-sickening sense of some doubt or dread which he dared not analyse, returned on him again; made all the darker and heavier by contrast with his previous relief. He felt himself quite alone in the world with her now, with none to come between them; his whole being shaken and convulsed to its innermost recesses, at the slightest sign, or look, or touch

from her, and yet she lay there before him unable to recognise him even, and had not even the strength necessary to give utterance to the delirium of her brain. At times he pressed his hot lips wildly on hers, but she never opened her eyes,—spoke to her piteously and entreatingly, but she gave no sign of recognition,—clasped the hot hands which always tossed about so wearily,—only to have them withdrawn, until at last he went to a distance and stood looking on her, perfectly sick to the heart with terror and perplexity.

There is nothing more unnatural or even more awful than to be forgotten or unrecognised by a loved friend, when delirious with sickness and fever. Such meaningless words as are uttered serve only to depress the mind which seeks to gather vain consolation from them: Denver had endeavoured long and vainly to connect and disentangle Laura's moanings. Once however he imagined that he heard his name muttered and he went up to her side, but without attracting her notice. Then he took up a wet sponge, left there, and began with trembling hands to bathe her forehead and face and even her feet. His heart beat so that he could hear nothing else.

Suddenly she opened her eyes, looking fixedly in one corner of the cabin as if she saw something she desired there, but whatever it was, she must have caught sight of it before she opened them. She half rose and tried to stretch out her hand and a flame-like smile flickered over her thin wan visage, then exhausted with the effort, she lay back on the pillow, and fell this time really asleep and almost instantly. The smile still remained on her features gradually dying out till it was lost. He stood by watching

her, hardly daring to stir, though he longed to clasp her in his arms now, as a little while back he had longed for water to give her; and but for her short quick breathing, the interior cabin grew quite silent and noiseless.

Overhead all was dead silent too, and the men remained looking anxiously out over the smooth livid sea, still flecked with yellow decaying remnants of foam: the fleecy motionless clouds overhead entirely precluded the sunlight. All remained quiet in utter calm for more than ten minutes still, when a slight murmur or rather a hissing sound, suddenly became audible to them from towards the north-east. The master and first-mate rushed at the wheel and grasped its spokes in readiness, and then turned looking sharply and anxiously in that direction: it seemed to act on the sailors like the warning hiss of some dreaded serpent.

A very slight ruffling of wind seemed to play along over the confines of cloud and sea, then it receded behind the horizon: but paltry as it seemed to have been, the waves it had passed over were white and reeling with foam, and the clouds were scattering in clusters. Again it played out to where the becalmed passive ship lay, stealthily and with concealed purpose as it were, just as a wild cat might stretch out its velvet delicate paw into the nest of a brooding bird, and once more withdraw it as fearing lest it might prematurely alarm its intended victim. Then the gathering wind seemed angrily to become aware that the sailors were on the alert. To pursue the simile, where the animal's eyes would have flamed with resentment, two or three black clouds, small but rapidly elongating emerged over the waves—only this, then all was quiet for a while:

then when the animal would have risen and sprung and flown at her victim—

What had happened; what was the matter? Everything in the cabin grew suddenly and unexpectedly dark to Denver's wondering eyes. A dreadful pause succeeded in which two or three footsteps rang above him on the deck, like the clashing of iron. He rushed to the casement and looked out.

The whole extent of the eastern horizon had grown black with sudden shadow and cloud, and the foremost fragments of it swirled by over the ship like dark wreaths of smoke, while underneath in strange and splendid contrast, the whole sea grew white as with foaming and furious passion and the spray was beaten out of it mast-high like rain. All swept down on them like a deluge, and the great vessel rose suddenly and drove away before the outburst of tropical tempest.

Outside she was a black speck driving through the white foam which seemed to sweep foremost everywhere, blown in advance by the violence of the wind; inside the cabin where Denver was, all became quite dark save for the faint traces of light cast on the roof at times, not reflected by the black turbid water, but by the foam which surged over it. The spray showered heavily on the thick glass with a sound like distant thunder, but the strong iron framework withstood its utmost efforts. The violent whistling of the wind could be heard overhead in the strained cordage and the hissing of the water underneath, mingled at times with human shouts and cries. The door swung open heavily with the vibration, and fell to and fro till he went across the sloping floor and latched it.

The hammock always swayed gently : he could just see a glimmering blank spot where Laura's still sleeping face lay, swinging backwards and forwards. He stood by it awhile, listening to the different noises all complicated one with another until he could be certain that he heard the sound of her faint but continued respiration among them, and then went again and looked out from the casement, blind with splashes of weltering foam and water. He was wildly anxious as to what had happened but he dared not leave the cabin. Through the wet glass he could dimly see a vast trackless extent of foaming waves following the ship, and overhead, the trailing rack of the dark cloud-covered sky, faintly luminous in thin places but unseparated everywhere, drove after. Wherever he could see the long ridge of a wave, it was slightly circular in form ; and where the tumultuous water was not white with foam, it was black with itself. The motion of the ship was swift and plunging, and yet, strange to say, so even at first that although the deck slanted till he leant on the underwale for support, yet Laura's hammock-bed swung so gently that she was never once awakened.

In the hush which came at long intervals he could always hear the sound of her breathing. Once or twice, raising a burst of shouting overhead, a heavy wave caught and struck on the plunging prow with a dull hollow shock, and then the strong-built vessel quivered through all her timbers.

He could hardly see for the darkness, but how to procure a light he could not tell until he thought of groping his way to the chest and searching in it. After a while he forced the lid open and turning over the contents, he man-

aged to find a tinder-box with a long bundle of matches attached to it. By striking the flint over and over again he obtained a spark and blew it up and lit the sulphur-tipped match from it. All this while the prolonged snake-like hisses of the water and the whistling of the wind were intensified. When he had obtained the glimmering of fire and was just about to rise with it, a gust of wind through some draughty crack blew it out again and he had to begin afresh. At length with his lighted match he again reached to the lamp, and it being prepared and charged with oil he ignited the wick, and a trembling reflection of warm light fell all over the cabin-walls, and on Laura's face and throat and golden hair, as the hammock swung to and fro from the hooks in the rafter.

Just then the door opened and a man staggered in holding by the post.

"We've been caught in a hurricane," he said, speaking as if in great haste; "it's carrying us with it, but the sky's lightening in places and the wind will die away presently. How is she? Still sleeping. Ah, that's the laudanum.—I can't wait; you must watch by her still you'd best not venture on deck," and without waiting for a reply the door was closed. At the same moment the ship rolled heavily on the broken surf of some smaller cross-wave and a burst of shouting broke out overhead. Again and again the bows plunged deeply and the stern rose and fell till the unusual motion made Denver's heart quiver and his head dizzy: then it passed off and in a momentary hush, the dull thudding of men's feet just overhead and the creaking and groaning of the rudder could be heard, until the sweeping tempestuous wash of

the water drowned everything again, with its peculiar heavy foam-scattering stormy splashing of waves,—a sound not to be conveyed in language.

The ship skilfully directed seemed to be slipping out of the circular sweep of the wind and tide, taking advantage of every opening in the ridges of the wind-cloven waves ahead. All they could do was to keep as much as possible straight before the wind and take every opportunity to turn aside. Of course it must not be supposed that they could see themselves going round. In those days meteorology was unknown, so that if they knew it, it must have been by instinct; for the entire circle which would have to be formed by the hurricane might involve some two or three hundred miles in circumference, though the circular inclination, from their point of view, being apparently at the very centre of the cyclone, was so very decided that any deviation too much to the left in their struggle to escape, the tempest's course sweeping to the right, would evidently have destroyed them: the pressure to windward might have thrown them into the trough of the sea and driven the waves surging over the sides and swamped them, or at the least thrown them on their beam-ends. Just a corner of a sail set, and inflated like the hood of cobra, served to direct the vessel. One man kept his place in the forecastle as it swayed to right or left and rose and fell all wet, grey, and gleaming. He shouted directions to one just behind, and so the steering orders were passed through a chain of mouths to the three men labouring at the wheel. To any but a seaman it would have looked fearful to watch the two or three sailors who still, in spite of everything clung about

in the dizzy rigging, and the great foam-dashed abysses in the hollows of the waves would have been no less dreadful to contemplate, as the great Albatross toppled over and fell into them and rose out again perpetually. None had time to think about the two human beings they had picked up in the boat.

When this incessant struggle against wind and sea had lasted about four hours, it began to show signs of relaxation, and the long-shut-out daylight streamed in on the wild waves, through the straggling rifts in the shattered and sombre storm-clouds. A heavy blinding deluge of rain began, and the afternoon sun piercing through in scattered rays, made the showers glance with gleams of golden light: one sunbeam fell right on the ship and caused the wet masts and complicated ropes of the rigging to glow like lines of red shifting fire. It was a magic transformation contrasted with the lowering sombreness of the storm half an hour before. But returning to the cabin, I have no longer time to spare for describing this cessation of the tempest.

During the long raging of the storm, no one as I have said came near them again, and Denver watched Laura Conway's sleep for more than two hours. About that time she woke up suddenly and came at last to self-consciousness as the effects of the opiate wore off, though at first without his knowing it, for he always sat on the box listening to the groaning of the buffeted side-timbers as the strong waves flung themselves up uselessly urged on by the wild sibilant howling of the wind.

What thing gives birth to the strange and unaccountable sensations by which some people are warned, when

about to resign the soul or life-principle which animates the body? In some instances no doubt it may be only the fore-shadowing bodily lassitude acting on a morbidly self-conscious mind, though it is experienced by others even when still in perfectly sound health. She lay still awhile on reawakening trying at first to recollect her wandering thoughts, but vainly and dizzily, for she could in no way recognise the place she was in. The lamp cast weird flickering eddies of shadow over the ceiling and walls as it swung from side to side, and she could feel that her hammock was swinging with it. She heard the liquid splashes of the waves and the loud murmur and hiss of the surge dashed and toiling ever uselessly up along the strong timbers, for then the very heart-beats of the storm were throbbing over and around the ship. Then some partial recollection of all she had passed through for the last five days, flitted through her mind and she felt herself shudder. She tried to rise but her will failed her: she found it impossible, and a terrible idea that she was going to die, swept through her mind in a tumult of fear, and she tried to cry out, but uttered no sound. Every episode of her past life seemed to revolve before her, from the most trifling events of her childhood down to the first meeting with Denver, and she saw her first impression of his face floating before her, as if it had been burnt into her brain, and her intense love and desire for him grew like a blown flame consuming her heart. Yet she lay quiet for a little while, and then she collected all her force and energy, and said, "Denver, Denver!" a kind of instinctive call, for she did not know if he were near her, but he appeared instantly by her side, with

startled anxious features. He threw his arms for a long while round her head, kissing her cold temples over and over again and then withdrew to a little distance, bending forwards and looking fixedly on her face, as though he saw something which disturbed him there and asked—

“Do you really know me?”

She answered so faintly that her words almost escaped him,

“Yes; but I shan’t for long, my eyesight’s grown dizzy and dark.”

“You’ve been delirious for a long while, Laura, and you’re weak. You’ll soon be better.”

Her head moved slightly as she lay back, as though to imply disbelief in what he said, and he put his face to hers passionately kissing her cold lips. They quivered slightly beneath his close burning pressure. Some indescribable outburst of the love in her heart caused her to endeavour to raise herself so as to clasp him round the neck—but her strength was not sufficient. There was a flush of blood in her cheek, but it died out and her face grew more pallid than ever. He having no knowledge of her weakness, merely thought she turned to shift her position.

All this while, the noise and tumult of the storm went on, and the wind-tossed vessel shifted and fell about more tempestuously than ever, so that he had great trouble in keeping his feet and grasped the swinging hammock-cords to steady himself. Then he kissed her cold cheek and went on—

“She’s gone. We’re free now, Laura, free to love each other without shame or mockery. *Dorothy is dead.*”

As the dying wick of a lamp flickers up into sudden light, so a slight momentary strength returned to her limbs, and she managed to rise and hang round his neck, just as his face was receding from hers. Her eyes must have grown very dim, for it was a mere glimmering blank before them. The rich curls of his black hair were grown very long during the voyage, and they fell twining and clustering among her golden ones, for awhile, during which she said with voice that faltered for breath ;

"I always loved you without mockery, but it's too late now love. It's useless to you or me Denver—I'm dying too."

He felt the arms tremble and relax round his neck as she pressed her silencing lips to him, then she fell back on the pillow, and he recoiled away from her with a sudden cry, piercing and terrible in its soul-drawn agony.

"O God, God! What have I done that you should torture me, Laura?"

Meanwhile outside over the ocean the light had been slowly returning, for the rain was pouring down heavily, and the sombre black drifting storm-clouds were rent asunder with a great rift, so that the grey daylight, bright with the sun, streamed through the narrow casement on to her face, and with the lamp on the other side her features were without shadow. It gave a kind of supernatural beauty to her, strange to contemplate. The colourless lips parted slightly as if they quivered, and her eyelids, half transparent, were closed, and their lashes were very long and dark on the pale underlid. A deadly unnatural pallor came over her countenance, and a faint shudder quivered visibly through her throat and shoulders and arms

and hands, down even to the nude white feet which were to be seen, under the end of the counterpane which covered her; then she lay utterly quiet. Her face was still and silent, one side of it in the pale daylight, the other golden with the glow of the lamp, while the ripples of her long hair lay streaming in a sparkling mass over the pillow and under her throat and shoulders.

Denver might have remained looking at her for more than five minutes. A terrible expression convulsed and grew into the lines of his face. Suddenly with a strange energy in all his manner, he went up to her quietly, and as if acting under an intense and strenuous effort of the will he took up her hand and felt the pulse, without success, then pressed his hand on where the heart should have throbbed, but there was no sense of movement. His eyes became hot and dizzy, and for a moment the dead face seemed to reel before them.

In the lull which had come over the tempest, her life-principle, her soul, had passed back into the many inter-tangled elements which the mysterious creative faculty of Nature had first evolved it from; perhaps even now a little swirl of electricity was dividing among the winds; but lying in her death-hammock, her pallid face, with its large shut eyes and dark lashes, seemed so diaphanous, with its mazy golden cloud of hair waving round it on the pillow, that one might almost have disbelieved she could ever have required the lost soul to animate her, or ever have been anything but the soul itself.

He gazed intently on her for a while as though stunned or dreaming, then at last one terrible dumb inarticulate exclamation of utter agony burst from his lips, out of the

very depths of his nature, as his soul began to comprehend what it had been deprived of. He bent over her wildly as though he would have kissed her, then he paused unable to, and said out loud, "Curse God for making my soul!" and went and sat down, his elbows on his knees and his head between his hands, his whole mind one dark empty soulless chaos, through which the aimless desultory beating of his heart shook ceaselessly, like a perpetual wind through an arid fire-blackened desert. His love had consumed everything that was his, and now its very cause was gone: though its longing and remembrance still consumed his heart, mind, brain, and nerves, as with an insatiable flame. He had nothing more to live for, his object in life was gone.

The attainment of revenge for her wrong had cost Dorothy both sanity and life—she had given them freely, and truly *she had obtained it*.

* * * * *

In a while some footsteps might have been heard coming down through the outer cabin, and the door was softly opened and the captain came in without his hat, his hair and the long oilskin coat worn during the storm saturated and running with wet.

"It's all over now thank God, I couldn't come down till I knew the ship was secure, but I sent the boatswain to you. They've lit the cooking fire in the gallery again: everything was interrupted so suddenly. How is she? What, sleeping still!" He came nearer and looked closely on the dead face, then he started back and looked down at Denver who never stirred or moved to answer him, then again at the dead features, and left the small

apartment abruptly. He and several others came back again and looked carefully at her, but they saw and knew she was dead.

During the little remaining daylight nothing could induce Denver to leave the cabin, to take food, or to answer coherently—save in monosyllables. He seemed sunk in a kind of lethargy, like that which is said to follow a deadly snake-bite and from which there was no rousing him. His mental faculties were as though drugged or stunned: had he been in full possession of his animal senses he must have done some injury to himself. I think there was something about his appearance that made them fear going near him, lest they *should* rouse him. They respected his sorrow and left him alone: only a platter with some food and water was sent to the cabin, but without attracting his notice.

I have before alluded to the superstitious dread in which sailors hold a dead body. It would be no exaggeration to say, that more than one among the whole of the illiterate crew before the mast, felt openly inclined to impute the storm which the ship had laboured through, to some mysterious affinity and connection with the death-agony with which it had simultaneously occurred, though none perhaps could have exactly explained his meaning. Directly the news was known through the ship, they began to make such slight preparations as were needed for the burial, but nothing was done to disturb the dead body, and Denver was allowed to remain by it in quiet. The sun sank stormily over the still high-running but subsiding sea, and every now and then as the stern of the Alb-tross shifted and rose and fell on the strong waves, the

setting sunbeams, turned red by the mist and vapour in the offing, would pierce through the narrow casements and fall on to the dead girl's face, lighting the hair round it like a radiant halo. After awhile the light faded gradually away. This was about eight, and still the long hours went by, while he sat there motionless, without sign or hope: he had not dared to look on her once, his strong will seemed paralysed.

The lamp burnt on with its fitful gleams and showed him always sitting with his face hidden in his hands, his long fingers twisted in the curls of his black hair. At last he moved and went first to the door, opening it and looking out into the large outer cabin. A dim lantern just expiring in fretful alternations of light and shadow showed him that it was empty, even of furniture. Then he came back to the hammock and stood by it awhile, and as the swinging light fell on his face, it seemed to show the fire and resolution all burnt away. His cheek and brow were still in places all white with the convulsive clutch of his palm and fingers. But a strange wild expression that was unnatural to him, gleamed in his eyes. He looked once wearily on the face, and kissed the shut lids and closed mouth once with his own quivering lips, then he lifted the helpless form out from the hammock, and with her in his arms, went out at the open door.

About midnight or after, a group of some seven or eight mariners stood talking together in the shelter of the fore-castle on the deck. How many there were could not be seen, for in the dusk their forms were all fused together into a dark indistinguishable mass, with dimly discernible white faces and here and there the gleaming of an eye. A

voice like Andrew Newton's, the ship-master, could be heard saying—

“She must be thrown over to-morrow morning at dawn ; but I don't know how we shall separate them. He seems to me to be quite mad over her. There's been something wrong there I know. I suppose you've got the hammock all shotted and ready to be sewn up? I gave out the key.”

“Yes sir, I reckon the shroud's all ready for her. Poor thing! what an end to come to with such a face! Who can she have been? I—”

He was about to say more, when one of them uttered a sudden exclamation of surprise and they all turned looking in the direction he pointed to.

The mist in the western sky was bright with reflection from the rising moon, a watery point of light just grown visible across the rough western waves, hanging there as if loth to part from the horizon and look on the misery of the world below ; and over the dark outline of the stern bulwark, near the wheel, they saw a strange black *silhouette* appear and pause for a moment—a man carrying a dead woman. Her head and neck hung back passively, and long hair, bright with the moonlight, streamed from it in the wind, while her hands fell dangling helplessly—this was all seen plainly against the sky, the next instant it was gone.

An alarm was raised and the ship was put about, though the sight which startled them had been so sudden that they half doubted what they had seen, till the cabin and hammock were found empty.

But these and the man steering (who placed them

CHAP. I.

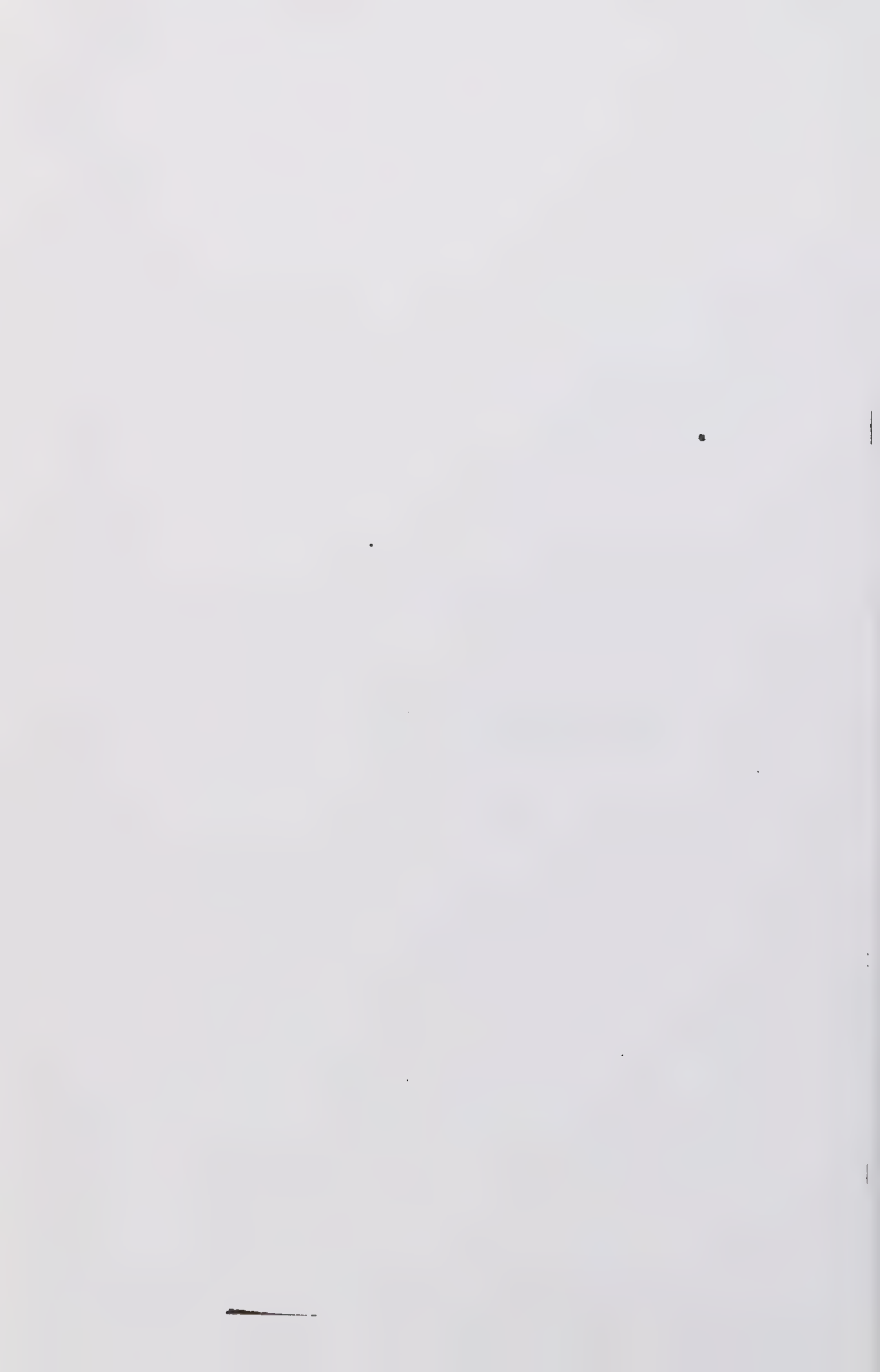
beyond doubt, by describing how he had seen a dark object suddenly emerge close beside him on the deck against the luminous sky, in the form of a man carrying a woman; and how passionately he had seen him kiss her throat just as he paused before leaping) were the last who ever set eyes on Gabriel Denver or his fellow-passenger from aboard the ill-fated Black Swan.

END OF THE BLACK SWAN.

THE YETH-HOUNDS.

A LEGEND OF DARTMOOR.

“Undefined sounds
That come a-swooning over hollow grounds
And wither drearily on barren moors.”



THE YETH-HOUNDS.

"ARE me! There was eary sights an' sounds out yonder i' th' yavils, Matyard-Torin way, when I was a girl. Few on our men-folk ventured across th' hill-tops after dimmet i' those days—nor we i' th' daytime either!

Not that we dustn't dare th' mist or th' darkness—enough o' that an' to spare round our own hamlet, my dears: but once upon a time we heard Gommer that then was, crouching i' th' chimbley-crounder like me now; warmin' her ould skinny hands, an' crewnting out an ould, ould legend she'd got i' her head: just as I might be to you, her nose i' th' peart-smoak, her shadow dwaling up an' down th' wearl ahint her—like a desolate ould witch's as it was!—Drearier an' ancierter than Granny hersel' seemed that same story; yet summat ther' was in't made me catch breath an' listen despite mysel', as I didn't often then. Moreover, she bad me to bring my stool anigh her i' th' bargain; for Granny didn't like any on us, since muther's death; a flammacking ill-conditioned kit we were, an' calling her ould witch an' haggaging as they did—shearm be to us, 'a hoary head's a crown o' beauty,' my dears—had crossed her mind a bit; so that

she'd grown to an awsome ould spit-fire at leas't; yearning to meark our flesh creep an' she could—keeping us quiet so for weeks together. But shearm to fright th' childer so!—'twas long or I got to sleep that night.

I lay with Granny that time—which we childer took it turn an' turn about to do. After prayers she walks up by herself; girning an' mearking mouths a' th' way as she was wont, whan we came nigh of her. I' th' morn-ing ere cock's-leart they found her dead i' th' bed beside me—sweet-tempered enough, poor creature! an' wi' a smile to her face such as we hadn't seen for many a long day!

I' th' confusion an' trouble that followed, we were left pretty much to oursel's.

Now there was me an' Kester, an' Stenie—a little chap then wi' curly white hair—an' muther's cousin Thamson's muther, my sister Joan th' nestle-draught; all laid by th' wearl an' burried now, so quick as I can remember them, poor things! The angel of death was over the house that day; there was sommat there we didn't like th' look on—you'll ha' larnt my meaning yoursel's ere long: and all that forenoon and after we went loostering o'er th' moorlands round feyther's thorn-fenced fields—the great fright we'd left ahint us doin' away wi' a' th' smaller frights around; for, thereaway, every land save feyther's was called hag-begagged, to keep us childer in proper bounds belike.

It was just at fall o' th' year, that day.

Presently we ran out in line 'cross th' common an' up to Strammel Linsherd; where we a' sat down to play round "Goodger's Cheese-press" as 'twas named. We'd a been

there a good space, talking o' this an' that, o' Granny's stories, an' how glad we were to ha' no more on them, when one on us—Stenie it was—looked up; an' next instant called out.

And we a' looked up and a' called out too; for sure enough a great moor-mist had risen up 'cross country an' come down on us i' th' wind. Even as we sat there, it closed a' round an' shut th' world out:—a great white light circle, like a saint's glory, with we childer an' th' high black rock midmost on't, an' nought else visible. The autumn-tide mists did come down that fashion then; ere you knew what was blinding your eyes you was lost sight of. So off we started with a run; homewards.

But we hadn't run ten yards ere we missed th' drangway, and horrid scared we were thereat; for there was uncouth beings abroad when th' fogs were on. Bingie, th' spirit—he that had to drain Cran-mere wi' an oat-sieve; an' his wife Jenny Greenteeth that loved stagnant waters: and a host of others as Granny had told us on! You could hear them on such-like days, crying out a' round you an' hunting their prey: though some say 'tis but th' rumbling o' your own voices after a'.

So there we were; lost on Dartmoor—cold to th' backbone, trembling like wet grass-blades: and how we kep shut o' th' quag-mires or pixy-gates is more than I could ha' told. There seemed no help in heavens above nor i' th' yearth beneath th' heavens.

Then awhile an' th' night came—duskier an' duskier, till we gave in utterly; and lying down in the wet began to cry wi' a' our mights. . . Aye! you'd ha' fancied indeed there was spirits abroad i' th' yavils by that time.

Of a sudden th' pup we had wi' us began a-whining too—though louder than any o' we: whereat we a' stopped an' stared one at tother. Presently he grew worse an' crouched down wi' his nose i' th' thorns: an' we a' rose up tongue-tied. . . But for him there would ha' been an awful silence round us; such as I hear at night whan you a' lie asleep an' dreamin' maybe. . . Then there came something like th' thud o' horse-hoofs—so faint, it might ha' been onè's own heart pit-pattering:—whilst right away west, th' reck lifted a bit, and there came a great rent through which we saw across th' miles upon miles o' purple heather to where God's blessed sun lay sinking so fast. Then it fell again. And next instant we saw a woman come flitting past us i' th' mist, a pack o' hounds at her heels—one gaining on tother, worrying, baying, an' scrambling at full tear—wi' an awesome coal-black horseman after them: and their eyen a' glinted like quickened yembers i' th' dusk, an' their breath seemed to set th' very fog of a flame. The fog made no more difference to our sight of them, than the wind could: our own voices had been mockin' and girding at us for miles round; their's were echoless. Th' woman stumbled an' streamed madly—the dogs leapt on her open-mouthed—the man wound an' blew through his horn: there was a hot breath o' wind in our faces and a clatter o' feet in our ears—and they were gone again!

It was Dando an' his dogs or th' "Yeth-Hounds," as they called them thereabouts: and they set eyes on them, said Granny, were doomed to die ere zennet came again.

How we got home that night I never knew. Maybe the pup led us, for there was no water-course leading our way

to follow up. All I know is that when we did get home we were well pummelled and that well we deserved it.

Next morn, Stenie an' Kester an' sister Joan th' nestle-draught, confessed they hadn't seen anything at all, but had only believed what I told them, an' I was pummelled agin—I that had seen it all plain as th' pup did an' as I trow they did too. And seven nights after th' pup first whined he lay dead on th' floor; and long it was or I deemed we shouldn't follow him.

Listen now, childer!

For that self-same lady, with her beautiful haggard face an' her bleeding feet, was none but Lady Barbara Helmore; she that Granny told us of th' night her soul passed away: and it's oh for a strange lady she was in the far-away days God made her in! It's many, many yesterdays ago since she was born, my dears.

There was two o' them once; Lady Barbara, an' Lady Alice—both dafters (by different muthers 'tis said) to Lord Helmore o' Thurlstone Regis, the dare-devil old Royalist—he that had his great stone castle down in flames about his ears and broke away to join Prince Rupert after all, as they tell i' th' song. And when the good king's head fell—a long, long tale they make o' that, my dears—he gat him gone abroad, serving the new one: and thereaway (for his only son was slain at Worcester) he took him a wife again.

Lady Barbara was born of an outlander: Spanish her muther was: but when her muther died at her birth, Lord Helmore married yet a third time:—and his second dafter, Lady Alice, was English all over.

And one was raven-haired, her eyebrows blacker than a

Skare-devil's wing-feathers, and with black-blue glistening eyes—so that few dost look steadily up under the brows of her, 'twas said: dark-skinned as th' Bloody-warrior; emperious an' unwomanly; an' a devil-may-care rider. Th' other was pale like a wind-flower; grey-eyed and with bright yellow hair—hair that shone out like fire when th' sun fell on't, said Granny.

One would have faced an' skeered th' devil away: th' other was scared-out-o'-mind at sight o' a cat even. Lady Barbara, jeering day-long as she was wont, swore her mother's forefathers had mouse-blood i' their veins: for aye! she'd a tongue wi' a tang to 't, had Lady Barbara—though who knows hersel' girds not at other's, 'tis said. An' Lady Alice's voice was soft, like spring rain; an' Lady Barbara's came out sheer-stinging, like autumn hail-stones.

So they twain, sisters as they were—one bearing as much zemblance to t'other as a yew-bramble bears to th' thorns she grows over—came home together along o' their feyther an' th' King.

They'd never been in England before either on them: and they'd allers been left to themselves in youth—neglected childer reap shame for themselves and misery for others, my dears.

An' thus they were left a' to theirselves i' th' old Hill-side Hall that lay tother side th' moors, i' th' rocks an' witch-elms by Sleepy Haiden: while their father, he went on to Lunnon still wi' th' King. And there was my great-great-grandmother Drewzelda, was maid to Lady Alice, and loved her well: but many was th' wild antic Lady Barbara played off on both—caring little, I trow, for aught save hersel'; jealous on her sister even then

they said. They hadn't o'er much to live on— Godless old Noll Crumle not only battered their castle to bits, but 'fiscated th' lands as well: Lady Alice's room was better fit for an owl's nest than she poor thing. For even th' house they lived in was a ruin, through which th' wind an' rain drove each other at random.

Lord! How th' wind did howl round that house for certain! But th' grass grows over everything in time, my dears; and there isn't one stone left on another now.

There they two lived:—quietly enough as yet. But one day there came a change for the family — “how beautiful upon the mountain are the feet of one that bringeth good tidings,” saith th' Bible; “break forth into singing together, ye waste places”; for that day there came a rider full gallop, bowing an' scraping out as how Lord Helmore had set out back from London an' how th' King had doubled th' family fortune, and made a yearl on him, too; and how th' old house was to be turned inside out until the old castle was builded up again, and how after that, Hillside Hall was to be th' gayest in a' the shire an' God willed it so. Aye me, what changes came about from that!

For th' Lady Barbara had been engaged from her very earliest, to a man she'd never yet set mortal eyes on, in the trouble an' hurry of those wild old times; and who should that be but my Lord Arthur of Balcarridas? A well-loved young cavalier he was an' a handsome: and now they heard for certain how he was coming down to the hall to take up his bride at last. Her ladyship brightened up at that, they say—'twas like a lantern flashed in her gipsy face; a' th' sulks seemed gone, or gone for a time at least.

Lord how she dressed and figged herself out beside his first sight on her, and all the things she did!

But then—what with the waiting, and what with the worry, she grew uneasy again. Many was the black look her sister now got from her, poor thing—helping wi' a' her might though Lady Alice was. Lady Barbara had something on her mind. Maybe she'd have liked her sister born a little less beautiful.

And suspicion, my dears, is a spark that soon sets th' soul a fire.

One night she fretted an' worried herself to an illness, and that night her sister slep wi' her as I used wi' Granny: and i' th' middle o' th' night Lady Alice woke up wi' Lady Barbara's long fingers round her throat and had to throttle her off like a dog.

"I'll strangle ye, Alice, an' ye dare to," says Lady Barbara hissing through her teeth; while Lady Alice screamed out trying to loose hersel'. But Lady Barbara was dead asleep for a' that; knowing not what she did—and oh if we had to live out our dreams, a strange lot we'd be for certain!

And early next morning—all unconscious—off went Lady Barbara—without her woman and all by hersel'—down to Sleepy Haiden i' th' Hollows, where there dwelt an old woman folk say she'd often spoke aforetime; a wrinkled old woman she was, my dears, like me i' th' face somewhat; knowing a sight o' letter-lore (an' star-lore too, as they called it) an' making believe to know more; th' crime o' th' county named her witch and maybe rightly. And a long confab they two had together that morn.

When she came away her ladyship hid a small black bottle down her bosom, in return for a' th' red red gold she'd left ahint her—for Lady Barbara was minded to make certain on her lover now she'd got him at last. And at sun-down that same night, up came Lord Arthur riding thro' th' witch-alsms to th' hall; and a generous young fellow he looked for certain; wi' hat i' th' hand, his sword an' his boots an' his spurs and his lace, and his flashing eyes over all o' them: and out came Lady Barbara ablush like th' virgin she was; and out came Lady Alice ahint her, a virgin too; and the sun fell full on her face an' hair while Lady Barbara was in th' shadow. Yet Lady Barbara was beautiful too they say: a strange ugly kind of beauty to my thinking—not like my Lady Alice's. And they say my lord's eye fell on hers first—no wonder: but that Lady Barbara stepped in atween them: half a head taller than my lord as they say was she, an' so stopped th' view. An' th' first thing she did—she being mistress there by right of age—was to make him take a cordial draught she'd got for him for the jolting he'd had. And there was those that stood by saw my lord's grimacing, fit to spit it out again. Two days after that an' Lady Barbara rode down full speed to Sleepy Haiden. Aye me! a towering rage she was in: an' how her black eyes glinted! Mother o' mercy! how she rode her great black mare—foam-flecked for th' speed she rode at,—all alone; not even Balcarridas wi' her—down th' turns o' the road till she came to th' witch's cottage; and off she lap' and in she won, and aye me! she'd turned that cottage inside out before she'd gone again! For it seemed Lord Balcarridas hadn't fallen in love wi' her at all, but wi' her sister instead—him as belonged to her from

her childhood and him so handsome:—yet he'd taken the love-draught in spite of it (an' cruel sick he was over it too, said Granny :) and her eyes flashed like an adder's and all her blood boiled over—for Lady Barbara had it in her head as how her sister Lady Alice had bribed the wise woman in her magic and brought it all about of a purpose.

Burning alive was the very least she should have for it.

And thereat, the old woman spoke out for her turn, saying that Lady Barbara could be burnt for a witch now, quite as guiltily as she: and there was somut about her quelled Lady Babara a bit. Moreover she declared as how the draught couldn't have been arightly 'ministered—that it hadn't stayed on his stomach—and that it must be given again: and somehow—what wi' her cunning an' what wi' her promises—she quited an' got her home again. And there that affair ended, my dears.

But though th' flame sank a little then, it sprang up again afterwards; affairs went from bad to worse at th' Hall and nought might avail to help her.

From being secretly, Lord Arthur grew openly, in love wi' th' Lady Alice, and she wi' him; so that a' th' Hall-household knew it at last, and none interfered between them—not e'en th' feyther. And there was more than one right glad on't too; for th' Lady Barbara had few friends in that quarter. They two loved each other blindly, my dears: and old Lord Helmore that was, yearning best for th' younger sister (as who not?) had no heart to say them nay, and gave in to their union. And one match was broken off, and another was taken on with,

my dears ; and maybe the thing might have ended there, but for Lady Barbara."

It was the intention of the author (an intention by no means finally settled), as communicated to the editors, to finish the story in the following manner.

The Lady Barbara meets, in a lonely part of Dartmoor, a stranger in a black Spanish dress ; they converse, and at a subsequent meeting she tells him her wrongs.

The stranger promises to revenge her, but demands, in return, her promise to meet him alone on the moor after the punishment of her faithless lover and her sister has been brought about. They find Lord Balcarridas and Lady Alice seated by a brook in the heat of noon. At the stranger's instigation Lady Barbara throws a deadly poison, received from him, into the waters which flow to where the lovers are seated : they, drinking of it, die. The Lady Barbara going to fulfil her engagement is met on Dartmoor by her demon tempter, Dando the wild huntsman mentioned in the beginning of the tale. He sets his dogs at her ; and the flight, and mad pursuit by the Yeth-hounds, are what the children in the story and many others in Devonshire believe themselves to have witnessed.

END OF THE YETH-HOUNDS.



DISMAL JEMMY.

A FRAGMENT.

DISMAL JEMMY.

Chacun tourne en réalité
Autant qu'il peut ses propres songes.

La Fontaine.

THREE gentlemen known to their artistic acquaintances by the familiar appellations of Bob Cawkwise, Dick Calderhead, and "Dismal Jemmy" Jackson, not long ago rented one "atelier" in common: a room some nineteen feet square, on the second floor of a house situated in a street which led out of the well-known thoroughfare of Tottenham Court Road. None of the three could as yet be represented as having achieved success in the mere *worldly* sense of the term: for indeed they were reported to be a trio of as arrant rascallions as ever neglected to clean their palettes properly. It will be easily understood that they clubbed together for economy's sake. The smell of turpentine and tobacco which characterized the room they worked in would, to an outsider, have been something astonishing to come across: the very floor and window-panes seemed saturated with it. On the pannels of the door their own portraits were delineated, in somewhat exaggerated and sportive proportions: while on the

shabbily-papered wall appeared various other playful demonstrations of latent pictorial ability. The pride and marvel of the studio, however, consisted in the skilful portrayal of a large and scraggy black tom-cat, which (flanked by a gigantic skeleton drinking out of a foaming pewter flagon) served to adorn and beautify the centre of the smoke-blackened ceiling itself.

To speak plainly, Messrs. Cawkwise, Calderhead, and Jackson, were students of art: and were, moreover, in no wise ashamed to acknowledge that fact. Mere beginners they were certainly: but—as they said themselves—they awaited only the sunshine of popular recognition and favour, to develope and blossom forth into the full bloom of artistic manhood. At present, making a virtue of necessity, they were content to wait.

Only the two first-mentioned of them had arrived at that thrilling period of professional life in which the young landscape-painter's excited imagination pictures his whole future life and happiness as trembling on the jealous lips of the Suffolk Street hanging committee. What artist is there who does not remember how his heart sank, and how his face grew pale, as he inquired—striving hard all the while to maintain an aspect of indifference—after the fate of his beloved picture?—the first one maybe which he had dared to consider good enough to submit for its chance of exhibition, beside the works of older and of better men. What great painter is there living now who does not recollect the wild vicissitudes of his early career?—its sacred unutterable delights: and above all its profound heart-rending sorrows. Bygone pleasure turns sour in the remembrance of an old man: but how unutter-

ably sweet those ancient sorrows seem to him!—how he longs to face them again, if only it were possible!

Well, two out of the three had attempted to exhibit, and each with more or less want of success.

Now the third—whose nickname gives the title to this story—was nobody.

Poor Dismal Jemmy! He appeared to be only too well aware of that fact. His entire time and energy seemed occupied in covering his old used-up canvases with bran-new surfaces of white paint—paint which ever afterwards refused to dry properly. How he had obtained his nickname nobody could guess: one must suppose it to have been the logical sequence of his manners and personal appearance. How he lived was one of those dark and subtle mysteries which baffle the most penetrative curiosity. It was *suspected* that he supported his existence on a small share of the bitter beer which was served out to his comrades from the “Blue-nosed Lion” over the way: although the slender condition of his finances but seldom permitted of his signalling out of window to the “Blue-nosed Lion” pot-boy on his own account. Where he was born seemed an enigma even to himself. He was insignificance personified. They had picked him up in some artist-haunted public-house; he honestly paid his share of the studio-rent, and that was all. Let his personal appearance be for the present immaterial. The only thing really remarkable about him was his deep, uncontrovertible, and dogged determination to become a painter.

Long and vainly did his two brilliant friends endeavour to damp and extinguish this said determination.

"The hidea of him ever doin' anything!" cried Mr. Cawkwise ironically, when his back was turned.

"Right you are, Cawk my boy!" answered Mr. Calderhead with an air of intense conviction.

But singular to state, their uttermost argumentative efforts on this subject only resulted in complete and utter discomfiture.

Dismal Jemmy's heart was set upon turning painter!

Let it suffice to say that a mystery enveloped his private life. Where did he sleep at night? Why, didn't Cawkwise declare he had followed Jemmy, after saying good night one evening: and dodging about for a long while, had at length detected him in the act of stealthily inserting his person among a crowd of shabby-looking miserable wretches, who shivering with cold stood all waiting patiently outside the gates of a large and hospitable mansion, situated in Cleveland Street, and intended for the reception and amusement of the homeless poor—in point of fact a workhouse? It must be admitted however that Mr. Cawkwise only mentioned this circumstance long afterward, at a time when some slight motive for spite might have existed in what he said. Even then he confessed to not being quite certain as to whether—in the foggiess and obscurity of the winter twilight—he might not have deceived himself into following the wrong man.

Yet—despite the vagueness and ambiguity which shrouded the surroundings of this mysterious individual—a close observer might easily have detected something crafty—nay, even *sinister*—in the dubious look of Jemmy's eye, which would at once reveal his true

character. Those eyes of his were very small, and must have been somewhat Chinese in character, for they decidedly turned up at the corners. He also squinted—or at least he did, if the description his two friends ultimately gave of him be true.

* * * * *

But up to the present, no single thing had occurred to interrupt the profound sense of harmony which linked the souls of these three together. They openly loved and fraternised with each other.

Mr. Cawkwise himself was in every respect a most truly remarkable man. His memory was so good that he knew by heart all the *bons mots* which had appeared in 'Punch' for the last twenty years. He smoked the strongest tobacco, talked the craftiest slang and sang the loudest song of any man among his personal acquaintances. In addition to this he stood six feet four in his stockings: so that it would have been an adventurous blue-bottle indeed that had ventured to insert itself and crawl between his head and the ceiling of the room he inhabited. He was thinner and more supple than a willow-wand. Mr. Robert Calderhead on the contrary was considerably shorter in stature, to say the least of it: but to counterbalance that defect, his bumptiousness and self-assurance were without any limit whatsoever; for mind is not matter, and is often just as willing to take up its abode in a small body as in a great one. He had a big head, covered with fluffy flaxen hair like a baby's: and he was a profound admirer of Mr. Ruskin. Mr Cawkwise however looked down upon that just-mentioned philosopher with a scorn which was only

redeemed from profundity by his utter ignorance of who or what he was.

But then Mr. Cawkwise was great in everything. Simeon Moses the well-known dealer of Bond-street was in the habit of employing him to manufacture authentic Turners and real Stanfields—so highly were his talents rated by that illustrious man! In spite of this, any one who had ever met him in the streets by daylight would have noticed an unmistakable look of shabbiness about the young artist's appearance. "*Mais que voulez-vous ?*" Great geniuses *are* given to fits of abstraction: and when one isn't thinking of what one's about, is it not a perfectly unaffected and natural act to wipe one's brushes or palette-knife on the lining of one's coat or on one's cravat—or indeed on one's wide-awake hat if absolutely necessary?

In this room he was absolute lord and master. As he never condescended to paint on a smaller size than five feet by six, his canvas and easel necessarily took up one half of it: and, of the two windows, he had one all to himself. Mr. Calderhead of the great mind and little body arrogated a lion's share of the other: while poor Jemmy was crowded up next the illuminated door. No wonder he was dismal! There the wretched western daylight reached him fitfully as, palette in hand, the great Cawkwise dashed recklessly backwards and forwards, loading white and blue paint on to his summer views of the "Welsh mountains of Coed-i-Coer," thicker than ever the snow lay over the said mountains in the depths of the winter-time. Poor Jemmy! he never expostulated: but always worked on in dead silence. Sometimes, when the others laughed or sang a trifle louder than usual, he would press the palms of his

hands over his ears; but that was his only sign of remonstrance.

In the summer before the opening of this story Cawkwise and Calderhead had adjourned to some country public-house: and the rough sketches they then made they were now developing amid the seclusion and gloom of the London winter. But Jackson to all appearance evolved his pictures out of his "inner consciousness"—for nobody ever saw him make a preliminary study. When he had painted a picture to his own satisfaction, he always sighed deeply, as though with a profound sense of relief: after which he rubbed it out again, composing a fresh subject on the top of it.

As certain artists will, both Calderhead and Cawkwise looked with secret jealousy and contempt on each other's productions. Whenever Cawkwise had painted any little touch particularly well, Calderhead would do his best to persuade him into spoiling it again: and *vice versa*. The only thing in which they honestly agreed was in despising utterly the work of poor Jemmy Jackson. But at present he was obsequiousness itself: and no criticism was ever poignant or insulting enough to pierce the outer covering of his soul.

Just one word of explanation is necessary here. The landlord of No. 180 London Street W., in letting the apartment, considered it as rented by Mr. Cawkwise *solus*: for it appears that this young and enterprising artist had neglected to mention the companions who ultimately took up their abode with him. Now the whole house back and front was let out in lodgings to persons of more or less respectability: and it was looked after by a grimy-faced

housekeeper, whose husband was out all day long, and whose children lived with the fowls in the front area. The landlord resided in a distant suburb of the town, and of course could only be communicated with by letter.

On the eventful winter morning of their arrival, a solemn, tall, and sallow-faced young man might have been observed, looming through the desolate fog along the side of Tottenham Court Road. Under one arm he carried an enormous easel and two or three proportionately-sized canvases, the corners of which projected high over his shoulder; under the other a mahl-stick, a bottle of turpentine, a bundle of "hog-hairs," a large and dilapidated black tin case, and a camp-stool. In one hand was grasped a dirty-white canvas sketching umbrella, in the other a latch-key—in his mouth was a pipe. Thus accoutred, he strode valiantly through the fog: and (save for a trifling altercation with a fiery-tempered elderly gentleman, the pit of whose stomach happened to come in contact with a leg of the easel) he ere long arrived safely in London Street. Opening the door of his habitation with great difficulty, he went bumping up the stairs thereof.

The whole house was alarmed at the unaccountable combination of sounds his canvases elicited out of the walls of the staircase, as he strove vainly to make them pass through spaces which were far too narrow to admit them. He dropped his tin colour-case, and remonstrated long and deeply while it went rattling down the steps: but at last he reached his room. Having arrived there, his first act was to light the fire.

This he accomplished with the aid of a liberal expendi-

ture of turpentine and a box of fusees. After this he refilled and lit his pipe.

Next a vague and desultory noise resounded through the house—it seemed as though some one with very large boots were attempting to quicken the circulation of his blood by a temporary performance of the double shuffle.

Then came little Bob Calderhead; accoutred in much the same fashion as his friend, save that he wore a high and battered hat. He was followed at a short interval by Mr. Jackson.

Their fellow-lodgers can by no means be said to have expressed any great sense of satisfaction at the honour of their arrival. Mr. Strangleman the attorney, who lived on the first floor, looked up at his gaselier with perfect horror; for it began to shake and rattle as though it intended to fall on his head at every moment. His ceiling seemed literally to palpitate under the heavy and tumultuous footsteps overhead. Strange unearthly cries, diabolical whistlings, and fragments of obscene songs, vibrated down the walls. Now in spite of his ferocious name he was a very harmless and timid individual: and being an invalid he began to fear for his life.

Before that brief and foggy day came to an end, the astonishment of the other lodgers had changed to a profound despondency.

About twenty minutes to four, the affair came to a crisis.

* * * * *

What the particular crisis in question was does not transpire—according to the author's intention it would appear that *crises* were to become of daily recurrence.

The landlord, however, foreboding the exodus of all his other tenants, takes advantage of the approach of rent-day—which he shrewdly suspects the artists of being but ill-prepared to meet—to get rid of the two noisiest. This he effects by giving the quieter (or more ‘dismal’) Mr. Jackson a commission for a landscape—on the understanding that the rent is to be deducted from the price of it; while at the same time Messrs. Caukwise and Calderhead are to leave. Mr. Jackson in this way acquires not only undivided possession of the “atelier,” but a valued patron for his art. Thus encouraged, and also owing (it must be added) to his indomitable perseverance, Mr. James Jackson attains to the summit of his ambition in being elected a member of the Society of British Artists, Suffolk Street; and, being on the hanging committee—*ex officio* as last new member—has the inexpressible pleasure of hanging the pictures of his late fellow-lodgers—*next to the ceiling*.—[ED.]

NOTE* OF THE PLOT OF

AN IRISH STORY.

A CERTAIN young Irishman named Michael D * * * who lives with a gentleman of property named Edgworth, a connection by marriage, falls in love with this gentleman's daughter. She regards him as frivolous and disdains him, while at the same time, for amusement, she partly encourages him.

A young squire of the neighbourhood falls violently in love with the heroine also; and being likewise rejected, sets down the cause of it to D * * * for whom he conceives a deadly hatred, and he instigates one of his tenants Thad McMorda to shoot him. This assassination McMorda attempts from behind a hedge, one evening as Michael D * * * is riding home in pleasant conversation with his patron Edgworth—but he shoots the latter instead. The inconsolable daughter offers fabulous sums for the discovery of the murderer, and Michael moved by her grief proposes to start off on a quest and not return until he has with him the murderer dead or alive. In a fit of enthusiasm she promises him her hand as the reward of success. For many months, in disguise, he wanders and lurks about the

* By the Editors.

country, and at the close of many adventures he succeeds in arresting the culprit after a hand to hand struggle with him in the seclusion of a morass.

Meanwhile the squire who has put on an appearance of reforming his riotous behaviour—going to church etc.—calumniates young D * * * and persuades the girl that her lover is enjoying himself at balls and races and courting another lady instead of keeping his word; also that the squire has himself emissaries all over the country to track the guilty man. Hearing nothing more from Michael she believes these stories, and urged by the squire's mother she marries him.

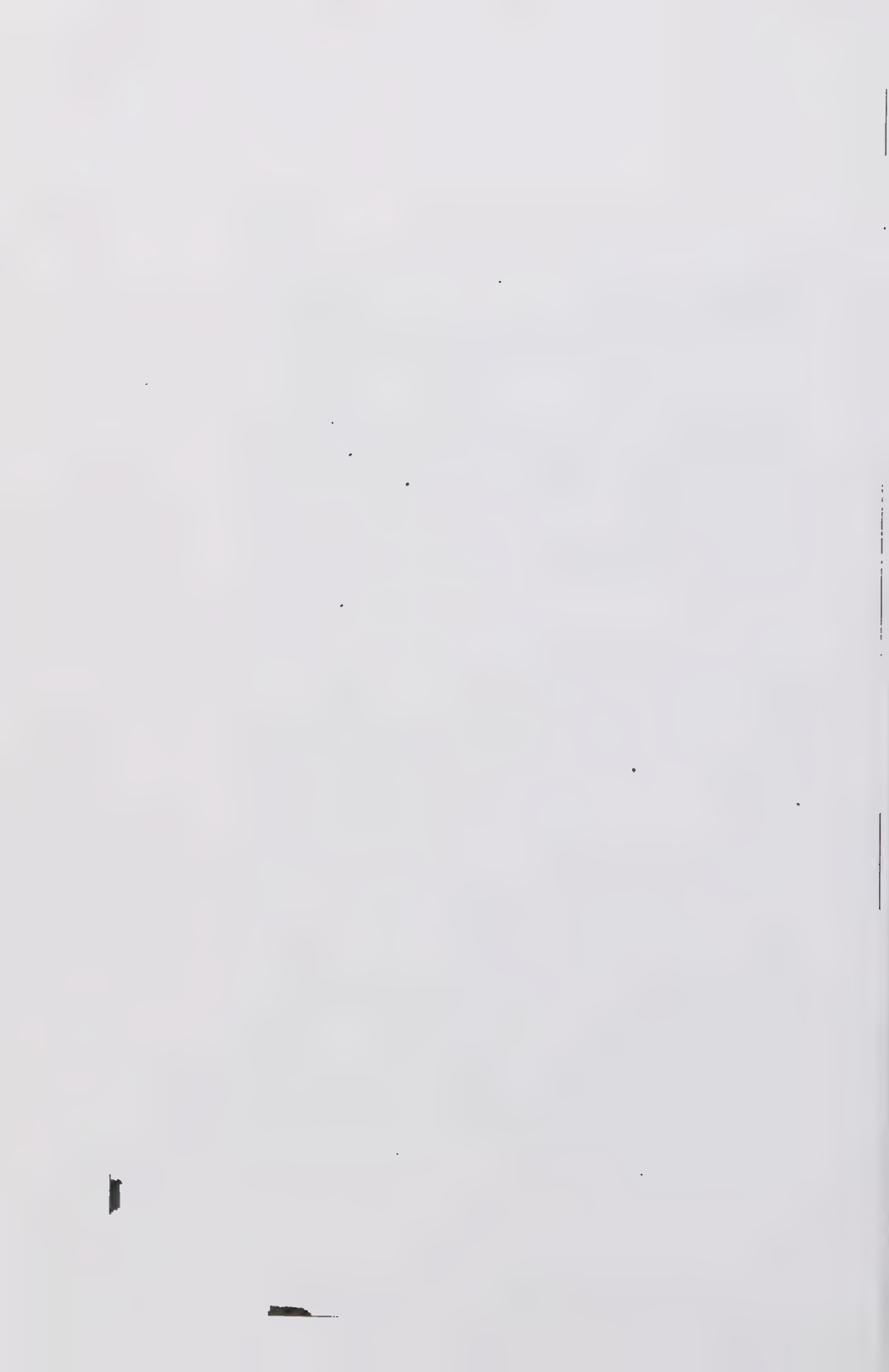
During the wedding breakfast Michael D * * * appears on the scene accompanied by the police and the murderer. After this blow to all his hopes he obtains a commission in the Indian army and distinguishes himself under Lord Clive. After many adventures in the struggle with Tippoo-Sahib the regiment returns to Ireland. Michael D * * * (now Colonel D * * *), and one O'Brady a firm friend of his, are invited to partake of the hospitality of the squire's house, where they find the lady in a state of great despondency owing to the squire's profligacy and habits of gambling.

With maudlin sentiment the squire insists on the Colonel's prolonging his visit on the ground that it cheers his wife's flagging spirits. Much tender friendship ensues between the old lovers—and ultimately, in spite of Michael's evidently honourable nature and sentiments, the husband grows jealous of him and insults him at a dinner party. The friendly O'Brady dexterously diverts the quarrel on to himself, and kills the inebriate squire in an

immediate duel which takes place by torchlight in the courtyard of the castle.

A year after this, the heroine, with the unanimous consent of the family and all friends, marries Colonel D * * *.

The outline of the plot left by the author does not account for the fate of McMorda after his arrest. Perhaps it may be surmised that the guilty squire dreading exposure succeeds in getting him out of the way.



TO ALL ETERNITY,
AND
OTHER STANZAS AND VERSES.

TO ALL ETERNITY.

A FRAGMENT.

Written for the purpose of being sung.

God! what a soul that woman had!

Alas!

My own grave shall witness her. There's no standard
In heaven above or hell beneath, for which
A woman's soul may not preformance—
May not expire in—no separate deed!

* * * * *

Once she was almost beautiful. Her eyes
Shone glittering, twin stars picked from the sky
Of God's most beautiful soul, twin promises,
In deep your buried heart whirled in their light
That even their colour seemed a mystery—
Whether the emotional deep spirit faded forth
In brilliant appearance. Her eyes

Kindled and shone like flames blown in the wind
 That day when first we met—For [] they made
 A boy's soul luminous, where now they burn
 The grown man's soul to death!

Ah love! love! love!

Whose unintelligible promptings lure
 Earth's mightiest nerves to thralldom—whose deep magic,
 Too swift for timorous afterthought, too deep
 For present doubt, makes blind the brain—whose hands
 Mould this man's heaven from that man's hell—whose gaze
 Infatuates—whose wind-shod feet resume
 The joys its hands disperse—whose yearnings storm
 Heaven with their high intentions, ere God paves
 Hell's wildest depths with them! Oh love! love! love!
 My soul and thine were even as one with hers
 When first that glance met mine.

That day the sun

Smote round our ivy-clad old hall till all
 Its redolent green turned grey. The floodland meadows
 Sultry and odorous sickened me, and I,
 Tired of the sunlight too, with all my brain
 Plunged in some nameless ecstasy, sought refuge
 Deep in the sheltered hollows of a wood
 Full of melodious silence and soft whispers
 Of wind-lent life among still boughs, that fringed
 The foot of the hills beyond . . .

The stillness grew

So deep at last that I could hear my heart
 Throb like an echoing footfall. Once a thrush
 Broke through the brambles with wild amorous cries;
 And as I marked its startled flight, the trees

Reeled in my sight till all their foliage
Seemed whirling in a dream.

How long I wandered
Dreaming my soul out thus, I know not; only
I think a sudden rustle underfoot
Broke up my reverie at last, and I
Stepped back o' the instant. Stretched across my path
Swift-striped and sibilant-fanged a viper crawled
From one stone to another, and disappeared
Even as I watched it.

Oh my God! had I
Only but known that sign for what it meant!
But that same instant a low tremulous sound
Passed like a sigh in the wind—which faltering
(Like to the first drops of an April shower)
Died quite away: only to recommence,
Until at last its sweetness reached a pitch
So sweet—so incommunicably sweet,
That all my blood turned fire within my veins,
And my heart sank within me. Then I knew
It was a woman's voice that sang.

The wood
Grew thinner thereabouts—for presently
I broke into a glade where the warm sun
Pierced through at random, and, just slipping round
The weather-beaten trunk of a huge oak,
Stepped out into the light. How shall I tell
What happened there? For first I stood half dazed
In one great blaze of sunlight. Then there came
A sharp stroke on my side, and I reeled back
Breathless and stupefied; whilst a shrill scream

Rang in mine ears. Just hovering past my face
I saw the suspended figure of a girl
Nigh grown to womanhood mount high i' the air
Some moments yet ere she could stay herself.
She had been swinging as she sang, her rope
Fast to the boughs o'erhead ; and I it seemed
Had stepped before her unawares, her song
Still on her lips low-linging ; till it changed
Into that frightened scream.

And now she stopped,
Sprang to the earth, and disappeared ere I
Could gain my feet again ; I only caught
One brief glance of her face—then she was gone.

* * * * *

SONNET

FOUND PREFIXED TO THE FIRST MS. OF THE
'BLACK SWAN.'*

No more these passion-worn faces shall men's eyes
Behold in life. Death leaves no trace behind
Of their wild hate and wilder love, grown blind
In desperate longing, more than the foam which lies
Splashed up awhile where the showered spray describes
The waves whereto their cold limbs were resign'd;
Yet ever doth the sea-wind's undefin'd
Vague wailing shudder with their dying sighs.
For all men's souls 'twixt sorrow and love are cast
As on the earth each lingers his brief space,
While surely nightfall comes where each man's face
In death's obliteration sinks at last
As a deserted wind-tossed sea's foam-trace—
Life's chilled boughs emptied by death's autumn blast.

* There were duplicate readings to several of the lines.—[Ed.]

SONNET

WRITTEN AT THE AGE OF THIRTEEN FOR A PICTURE

BY MRS. STILLMAN.

Leaning against the window, rapt in thought,
Of what sweet past do thy soft brown eyes dream
That so expressionlessly sweet they seem?
Or what great image hath thy fancy wrought
To wonder round and gaze at? or doth aught
Of legend move thee, o'er which eyes oft stream,
Telling of some sweet saint who rose supreme
From martyrdom to God, with glory fraught?
Or art thou listening to the gondolier,
Whose song is dying o'er the waters wide,
Trying the faintly-sounding tune to hear
Before it mixes with the rippling tide?
Or dost thou think of one that comes not near,
And whose false heart, in thine, thine own doth chide?

GIPSY SONG.

"I love very well
The first blossoming
(I love well I ween)
That blooms in the spring ;
Its purple and green
Seem meet for some queen,
To bind in her hair's loosening.

"I should love well to match me !
(The light of high heaven
Burns in my eyes !)
And I love well," she cries,
"The young men to watch me,—
But ah ! who can catch me ?

For I run with feet fleetier than wind through the skies."

DEVONSHIRE CHILDREN'S SONG.

A dwalling drumble-drone ie' th' ruets,
 An apple-dreane aboo,
 Th' yapple-dreane startled and stugged ie' th' fruits,
 Th' drone ie' th' yavil flew.

T'ould coo cuddled agin th' colt,
 Th' puss-cat scrudled a-vigging her claw,
 For th' yangles wert just beginning ter moult
 Sae the yearth wert laden wi' snaw.

An apple-dreane an' a drumble-drone
 Wert aw' ther' wert to zee,
 Th' drumble-drone lay deed ie' th' snaw,
 And ter yapple-dreane i' th' dree!

GIPSY SONG.*

The growth of love's fruit is
Most meet to eat ;
Yet a snare where the root is
Entangles the feet.

To passion no stop is
When true love hath sinned ;
But the flower that love's crop is
Droops dead i' the wind.

* Supposed by the author to be translated from the Zingali by
a philologist.—[Ed.]

FRAGMENT OF BALLAD.*

Woe to the unborn sons of the Tracies !
(Say what redemption is left through all time)
 O could they reach to the land where God's grace is,
 Baffled and faint with the storm-wind's embraces,
(The wind that wails for their forefather's crime)
 With ever the wind and rain in their faces,—
 Never again till the end of time.

ZINGALI SONG.

La chenda di clais
 And re mi claise
Camela Camela
 La bastarda broh jugi
 Di brotomuchi
 Clonel a badnoi.

* Concerning a descendant of one of those engaged in the murder of Thomas-a'-Becket.—[Ed.]

SONG.

Lady, we are growing tired !
Lo ! our faltering breath,
Once with new-born love inspired,
Holds the love we once desired, as weary unto death.

Lady, Love is very fleet,
All too fleet for sorrow :
But if we part in time, my sweet,
We'll overtake Love's flying feet,—
If we part to-day, my love, we'll find new love to-morrow.

SONG.

Sing away, Oh sing away !
My father's ship sails swiftly home :
O'er the wind-blown waves a-foam
What gifts will he bring away ?

A golden coif to bind my locks—
Sing away, Oh sing away !—
Or else two white-and-silver smocks.
But if he drift on the sea's rocks
What gifts will he bring away ?

SONG.

Love is a desultory fire,
Blown by a wind made musical with sighs,
A void and wonderfully vague desire,
Which comes and flies.

Of once-sown seed, who knoweth what the crop is ?
Alas ! my love, Love's eyes are very blind !
What would they have us do ? sun-flowers and poppies
Stoop to the wind.

STANZAS.

What sweet lips are reddening
 In the void beyond to-morrow?
 Ah! what cause for joy or sorrow
 May the coming seasons bring?
 Nay! they're all too sweet, those days, for our imagining.

Many a youth is fain for love,
 Many a maiden's heart is yearning:
 Oh hasten while you can to prove
 The thoughts wherewith your souls are burning.
 Life is all too short for sorrow,
 Yesterday died beckoning the reluctant morrow.

The second stanza appeared to have been discarded,—[Ed.]

LAURA'S SONG.

Alas ! who knows or cares, my love,
If our love live or die,—
If thou thy frailty, sweet, shouldst prove,
Or my soul thine deny ?
Yet merging sorrow in delight,
Love's dream disputes our devious night.

None know, sweet love, nor care a thought
For our heart's vague desire,
Nor if our longing come to nought,
Or burn in aimless fire ;
Let them alone, we'll waste no sighs :
Cling closer, love, and close thine eyes !

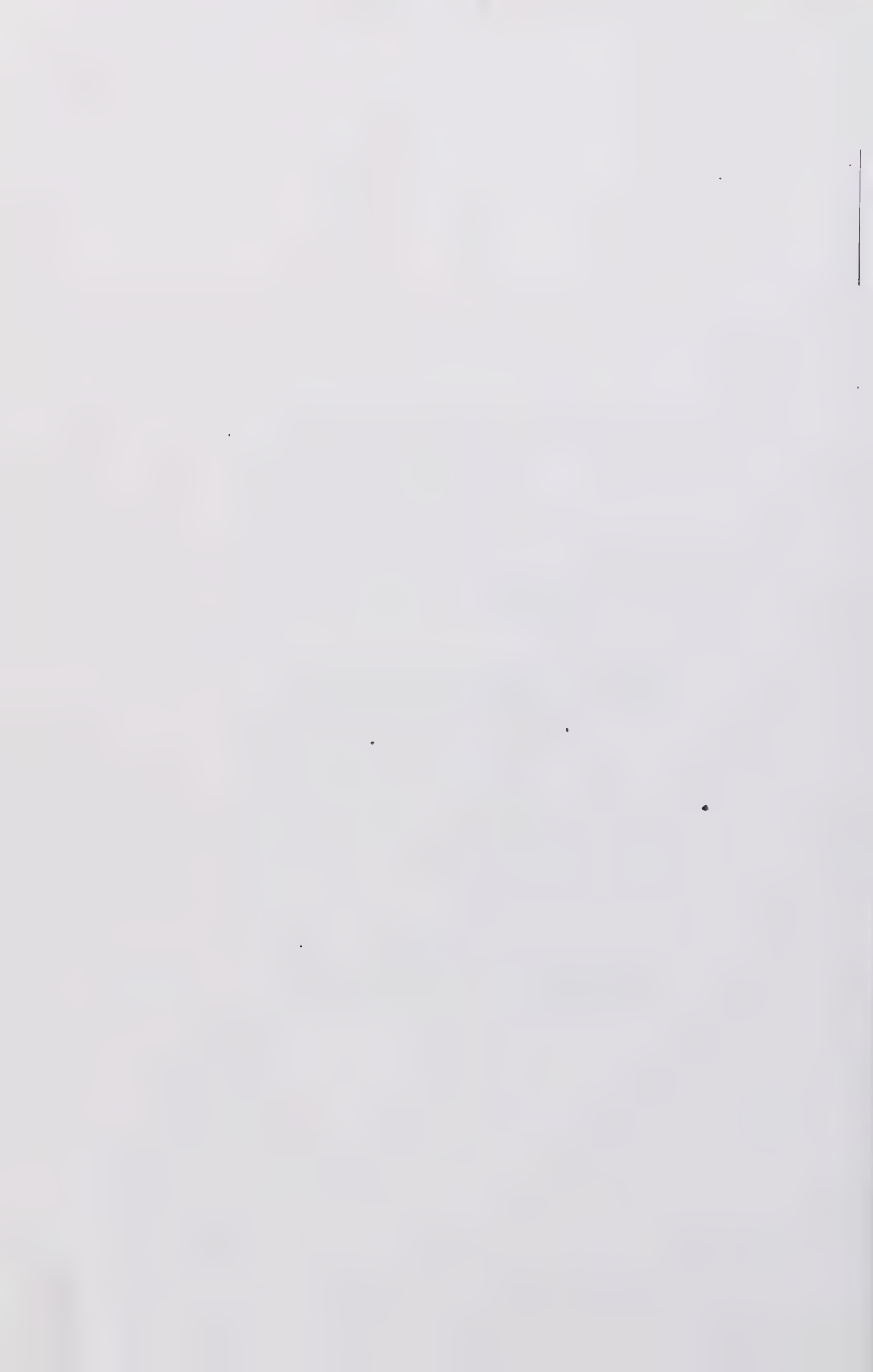
STANZAS.

Oh delirious sweetness which lingers
 Over the fond lips of love !
 Hair-tendrils clinging to fingers
 Tangled in blossom above !
 Intense eyes which burn with a light made
 No man knows whereof !
 Sweet lips grown more subtle than nightshade,
 More soft than plumes of a dove !

But love, like a fleet dream eluding
 The desire of a wakening sleeper,
 Love, grown too fondly excluding,
 Consumes the heart deeper and deeper
 In a passionate waste of desire !
 Like the flame of a desert which rages,
 Our love shall extend through the ages
 Though our souls blow asunder like fire.

Oh reluctantly lingering breath !
 Oh longing with sorrow requited !
 Oh blossom the storm-winds have blighted
 Deep down in the shadow of death !

THE LAST STORY.



THE LAST STORY.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT my earliest inclinations were, their influence upon my mind, and their nature, I know not. Only I know that in the innermost recesses of my soul I considered myself a deep disgrace to every one related to me; for never did my mother catch sight of me without some hard and unpleasantly rebounding missile following upon my path, and never did my father return home without making a kick at the little figure ensconced on the floor. I was the only child of the family: but to my intense astonishment, edging myself in one day, I saw my mother lying stretched out in her bed with some strange being on her breast, its face so weird, such a combination of youth and old age, that I stood horrified. A young man in a black coat stood beside her. I was not a child of imagination, but my observation had quickened, I think, every hour since my birth: I turned and fled.

When I returned that evening the door was locked. In the early morning, my father stepping out to his work, I desperately ventured in. One of the neighbours was sitting up with my mother, who, looking at me with an air of dignity only to be transcended by that of her voice, said, "Boy, this is your brother. Drat the child!" she continued, "he don't even offer to kiss him." There was a pause, for I stood not knowing which way to turn my head.

"Madam," began Mrs. S— "it's just as you told me, he is the tyrant of the family."

CHAPTER II.

FROM that time forth I scarcely ventured back to the house for a week. How we children managed to live up our alley, swarming as we were, God alone knows. It is not often that one of us survives to attain any other position save that of a dwarfed and beery imbecility. But the faculties are sharpened like those of rats: not the slightest thing eatable wedged into the crannies of the pavement, or splashed upon the wall, no piece of carrot or end of cabbage-leaf, can possibly elude our attention. We swarm and live like animals—it almost seems as though on one another. I remember I often used to sit watching the sparrows on the parapets, wondering whether they were as hungry as I, convincing myself that they were not, and even feeling jealous of them. We just stopped short of eating the horse-dung in the streets: and this in reality is what the sparrows lived upon, for I am sure we left them nothing else. The children I lived amongst were simply like rats. We neither bit nor choked each other: but, if any piece of garbage had been flung suddenly up the alley, we should have fought each other wildly for it with our teeth and nails.

Hitherto I had been free to do as I liked: yet I had never once ventured out into the main street. Suddenly I found a new duty devolve upon me. My mother rose

from her bed, and invested me with the care of the baby,—me, a child not four years old. I was terrified by this baby : I knew nothing of its wants. It was so lean and weird-looking that I got into a habit of holding it before my stomach with its face downwards, so as to avoid its pitiable glance. Things went on in this way for six months. The baby grew no heavier certainly, but its face grew worse and worse : and one evening, with profound trembling, having been out all day from eight in the morning, I returned without it. My mother was furious. She could not have cared in the slightest degree for the child ; but, after thumping me as much about the neck and face as she dared, she took me up under her arm, and carried me straight off to the Police Station in Bow Street. She charged me with having murdered my brother.

This sudden change out of the mouth of our alley into the world where I had never ventured was a perfect revelation to me. Hitherto I had been simply indifferent to any ill-treatment I received from my parents. Gliding through these enormous streets, for such they appeared to me, we came at last to a place which seemed to blaze with light, where fearful blue men in uniforms, such as I had noticed tramping near the entrance of our alley, and sometimes up it, were standing in heaps. I was carried straight up into the dock, and I was placed by one of the policemen in a sitting position on the top of it, for I could have been seen in no other way. I have no doubt everybody in the court looked at me, and wondered what so small an offender could possibly have done. But my head was whirling round and round, and I saw nothing. I could just hear my mother storming beside me, until at

last she was imperatively made to be quiet, and a series of questions were put to me which at last, by dint of a great shaking on the policeman's part, I began to hear. "What have you done with the baby?" "What have you done with the baby?" began my mother; at which she was silenced. Again the question was put. There was a complete silence in the room for an instant. What no efforts could extort from me at home now came out.

"I sold it," answered I.

"What for?"

"Sixpence."

"And what did ye do with the sixpence, you . . . ?"

"I bought bread with it."

"Whom did you sell it to?"

"To Mrs. McDermont at the top of our court."

Now Mrs. McDermont's habits were well known, and she had just lost a child of her own. And the policeman, taking me up in his arms, at a sudden snatch made at me by my mother, we all walked off together—my mother, I, and he.

It was not long before we reached our court: we took but an instant more to attain the top of it, and stumble into an apartment in which, many evil vapours as there were, a smell of gin strongly predominated. The policeman flashed his lantern over all. There lay Mrs. McDermont on the floor; the baby, some yards from her, screaming shockingly; and an emptied bottle of gin between them. Nevertheless Mrs. McDermont's slumber was evidently coming to a close. My mother snatching up the baby, we went back to our own door, where the policeman left us, with an unalterable gravity. My father was still lying in the room, a little

bit sleepier than before perhaps, but still quite indifferent. The baby was instantly put to bed. I sat down upon the floor, and my mother upon a chair. This might have gone on for three-quarters of an hour. Suddenly my mother rose. I was paralysed,—when I felt the door open quietly behind me, for I was sitting near it, and it pushed me softly against my back. A second female had entered the room. Her face was certainly not very steady, and her eyes were bleared. She walked straight up to the bed, and tried to draw the baby out of it.

“Biddy Maclean,” she said in a tone of maudlin reproach, “this baby belongs to me, not to you, as sure as there’s a God in heaven.” In an instant my mother had flown at her, and seized her by the hair. But Mrs. McDermont, nowise loth, seized my mother by the hair as well: and in an instant began a scene such as is almost impossible to describe. It was as though two tigers had rushed at each other. These two women were fighting for the possession of the baby which I had sold in the morning: but it must also be recollected that one of them was my own mother. In another instant I had quitted the room, fled like an animal from under the archway, and disappeared I know not whither among the streets. The whole world seemed one cloud of fog, luminous here and there—otherwise as dark as it could be.

How long I ran in this way I scarcely know. At last I ran full against some hard clammy substance, which I afterwards found out by inquiry to be a pillar of iron supporting a roof above. Recoiling from this, I next fell against a heap of some round rough objects which reeled in such a way that the topmost fell at

my feet. Here I stopped panting for a moment. At last I began to feel about me. It was a great big basket of a kind used to contain fruit. These particulars I knew nothing of at the time. I only found a great cavity within the basket, filled with straw, and round cold objects which I scarcely knew the use of. But I was very quick, as I have already said; and, noticing the straw at the bottom of the basket, in another moment I had pulled it all out as a monkey might have done. And, laying myself in a kind of a circle, I was on the point of going off fast asleep, when a faint quick taste attracted me. I found it was the fruit that I was lying upon. Then I began to gnaw at it ravenously.

It had always been the author's purpose to write a tale of London life of the very lowest class—with the intention of its being serious and pathetic, in contradistinction to the habit of representing these classes from the ridiculous point of view. The above fragment—dictated from the sick-bed—was in furtherance of this purpose. The child, after several years of the life of a street Arab, was to practise drawing pictures on the pavement for a livelihood. A celebrated historical painter, attracted by his performances, was to take him as his pupil. The pupil, being wanting in true artistic perception, was never to have rivalled his master, but was intended to become a sort of Vasari of the period. Maclise was to have been studied as a type of the historical painter.—[Ed.]

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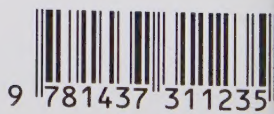
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ERRATUM.

Page 3, Vol. II., for *Hedera Muralia* read *Hedera Muralis*.

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